EVENINGS IN SAINT PETERSBURG

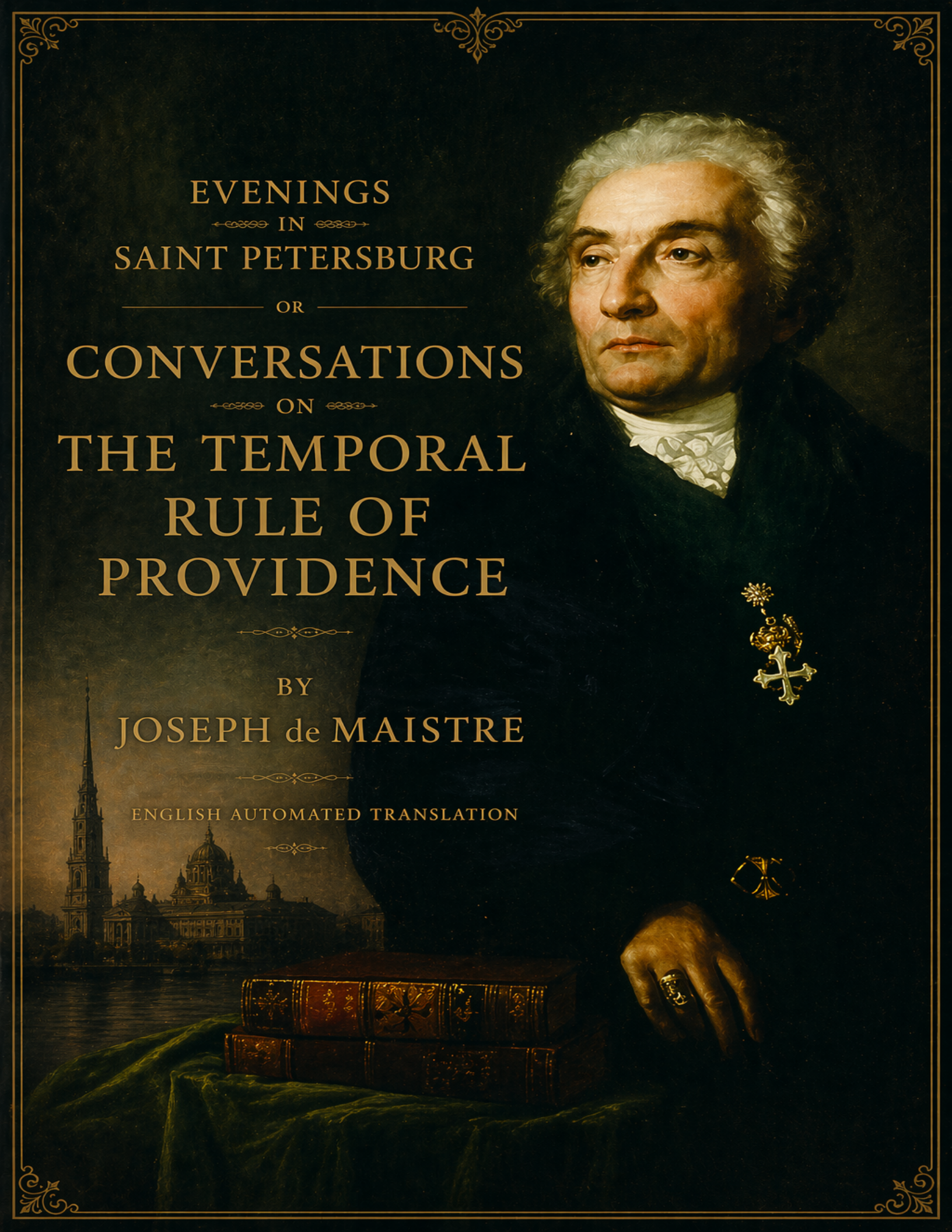
OR

CONVERSATIONS ON THE TEMPORAL RULE OF PROVIDENCE

BY

JOSEPH de MAISTRE

ENGLISH AUTOMATED TRANSLATION



Evenings in Saint Petersburg

OR CONVERSATIONS ON THE TEMPORAL RULE OF PROVIDENCE

By Joseph de MAISTRE

— 1821—

ALL PARTS OF THIS BOOK ARE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Modern Introduction

Joseph de Maistre's *The Evenings in Saint Petersburg* stands as one of the most provocative defenses of traditional order ever written. Far from being a mere political tract, it is a profound meditation on the Temporal Government of Providence, seeking to explain how a just God interacts with a world defined by violence, suffering, and disorder.

The central inquiry of the dialogues is theodicy: the justification of God's goodness in the face of earthly evil. Maistre rejects the Enlightenment view of a "clockmaker" God who sits aloof from his creation. Instead, he argues that God's justice is constantly at work through the medium of history and human suffering. To Maistre, the French Revolution was not a random political catastrophe, but a "divine judgment"—a necessary, albeit bloody, purgation of a society that had abandoned its spiritual foundations.

Politically and socially, Maistre contends that since human nature is fundamentally degraded by the Fall, it cannot be governed by reason or "social contracts." Stability requires absolute authority—both "Throne and Altar." He posits that the true glue of society is not the legislator, but the *Executioner*, who represents the final, terrestrial manifestation of divine justice. Without the fear of certain retribution, Maistre believes, the fragile thinness of civilization would instantly collapse into chaos.

The interlocutors in the *Evenings* represent the three conflicting forces of European thought following the collapse of the Ancien Régime. The Count, acting as Maistre's primary mouthpiece, dominates the conversation with a rigorous, often chilling intellectualism that seeks to re-establish the absolute sovereignty of God and the Monarch. He is the voice of the "Prophet of the Past," utilizing his immense erudition to dismantle the optimistic illusions of the 18th century. Beside him, the Senator provides a more contemplative, mystical dimension to the defense of tradition. Drawing from the Russian Orthodox milieu, he emphasizes that human reason is a flickering candle compared to the sun of ancient, inherited wisdom, reinforcing the idea that society is an organic growth rather than a mechanical construction.

Standing in opposition to these two pillars of tradition is the Chevalier, a young French emigré who carries the lingering spirit of the Enlightenment. He represents the "modern" man—well-meaning, skeptical, and focused on individual liberty—who finds the Count's assertions regarding the necessity of the executioner and the divinity of war to be scandalous. Through the Chevalier's frequent objections and eventual concessions, Maistre creates a psychological progression for the reader. The dialogue serves as a staged "conversion" where the Chevalier's secular, liberal sensibilities are gradually overwhelmed by the Count's relentless logical and theological force. This triadic structure allows Maistre to address the reader's own potential skepticism, leading them from the shallow optimism of the salon into the darker, more profound realities of the "Temporal Government of Providence."

As the Count observes during one of his more piercing critiques of modern skepticism:

"The more we examine the universe, the more we are led to believe that it is a great book, written in a language that we do not understand; but we see enough to know that it is not a work of chance."

The interaction between these characters ultimately suggests that truth is not found in the solitary musings of a philosopher, but in a return to the collective, authoritative "Conversation" of the ages. By the final evening, the

Chevalier's initial resistance has been transformed into a somber realization of the weight of human history and the inescapable hand of the Divine.

Note on the Text: The following English translation was generated using Google Translate from the original French text (*Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, 1821, *http://www.biblisem.net/narratio/maissoir.htm*). The machine-translation origin should be taken into account regarding nuanced theological and philosophical interpretations.

FIRST INTERVIEW

In July 1809, at the end of a particularly hot day, I was sailing up the Neva River in a rowboat with T***'s Privy Councillor, a member of the St. Petersburg Senate, and the Chevalier de B***, a young Frenchman whom the turmoil of his country's revolution and a host of bizarre events had driven to this capital. Mutual esteem, a similarity of tastes, and some mutual service and hospitality had formed a close bond between us. Both of them accompanied me that day to the country house where I was spending the summer. Although situated within the city walls, it is nevertheless far enough from the center to be considered *countryside*, even *secluded*; for the area is far from being entirely occupied by buildings. and, although the gaps in the settled areas are closing visibly, yet one cannot foresee whether the city will one day reach the boundaries traced by the masterful hand of Peter I.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening; the sun was setting in superb weather; the light breeze that had been driving us died down, and we saw the sail fall slack. Soon the standard that announces the sovereign's presence from the top of the imperial palace, hanging motionless against its staff, bespoke the stillness of the air. Our sailors took to the oars; we bade them row with a gentle stroke.

Nothing is rarer, but nothing is more enchanting than a beautiful summer night in Saint Petersburg, is it that the long winters and the rarity of such nights make them more desirable and thus more charming? Or is it, as I believe, that they are truly milder and calmer than those of the fairest climates?

The sun, which in temperate zones rushes westward, leaving behind only a fleeting twilight, here slowly skims the earth, from which it seems to detach itself reluctantly. Its disk, surrounded by reddish vapors, rolls like a flaming chariot over the dark forests that crown the horizon, and its rays, reflected by the glass of palaces, give the viewer the impression of a vast conflagration.

Great rivers usually possess a deep channel and rugged banks that lend them a savage aspect. The Neva flows full within a magnificent city: its limpid waters touch the grass of the islands it embraces, and throughout the city it is contained by two granite quays, aligned as far as the eye can see, a kind of magnificence repeated in the three great canals which run through the capital, and for which it is not possible to find the model or the imitation elsewhere.

A thousand longboats crisscross and crisscross the water in every direction: from afar, one can see foreign vessels furling their sails and dropping anchor. They bring to the North Pole the fruits of the scorching zones and all the bounty of the universe. The brightly plumaged birds of America sail on the Neva with groves of orange trees: upon arrival, they find the coconut, the pineapple, the lemon, and all the fruits of their native land. Soon, the wealthy Russian seizes the riches presented to him and throws the gold, without counting, to the greedy merchant.

From time to time, we encountered elegant rowboats whose oars had been removed, drifting gently along the peaceful current of these beautiful waters. The rowers sang a national anthem, while their owners silently enjoyed the beauty of the scene and the calm of the night.

Near us, a longboat swiftly carried a wedding party of wealthy merchants. A crimson canopy, trimmed with gold fringe, sheltered the young couple and their parents. A Russian band, tightly packed between two rows of oarsmen, sent the sound of its noisy horns far and wide. This music belongs only to Russia, and it is perhaps the only thing peculiar to a people that is not ancient. A multitude of living people have known the inventor, whose name constantly evokes in his homeland the idea of ancient hospitality, elegant luxury, and noble pleasures. A singular melody! A brilliant emblem made to occupy the mind far more than the ear. What does it matter to the work whether the instruments know what they are doing? Twenty or thirty automatons acting together produce a

collective thought [or will] in each of them; the blind mechanism is in the individual: the ingenious calculation, the imposing harmony, are in the whole.

The equestrian statue of Peter I stands on the banks of the Neva, at one end of the vast *Isaac* 's Square. His stern face gazes out at the river and seems still to animate this waterway, created by the genius of its founder. All that the ear hears, all that the eye beholds in this magnificent setting, exists only through the thought of the powerful mind that brought forth so many magnificent monuments from a marsh. On these desolate banks, from which nature seems to have banished all life, Peter established his capital and created subjects for himself. His formidable arm is still outstretched over their descendants who throng around the august effigy: one looks, and one cannot tell whether this bronze hand protects or threatens.

As our boat drifted away, the boatmen's songs and the confused sounds of the town gradually faded away. The sun had sunk below the horizon; bright clouds cast a soft light, a golden twilight that defies description and that I have never seen anywhere else. Light and darkness seemed to mingle and harmonize, forming the transparent veil that then covers these landscapes.

If heaven, in its goodness, were to reserve for me one of those rare moments in life when the heart is flooded with joy by some extraordinary and unexpected happiness; if a wife, children, brothers separated from me for a long time, and without hope of reunion, were to suddenly fall into my arms, I would want, yes, I would want it to be on one of those beautiful nights, on the banks of the Neva, in the presence of those hospitable Russians.

Without sharing our sensations, we were delighting in the beauty of the spectacle surrounding us, when the knight of B*** suddenly broke the silence and exclaimed:

– I would like to see here, on this very boat where we are, one of those perverse men, born for the misfortune of society; one of those monsters who wear down the earth.

– And what would you do with it, please? (This was the question from his two friends speaking at the same time.)

“I would ask him,” the knight continued, “if this night seems as beautiful to him as it does to us.”

The knight's exclamation had pulled us from our reverie: soon his original idea initiated the following conversation between us, the interesting consequences of which we were far from anticipating.

THE COUNT

My dear knight, Wicked hearts never know a fair night or a fair day. They may amuse themselves, or rather, numb themselves: they never experience true pleasure. I do not believe them capable of feeling the same sensations as we do. Moreover, may God keep them away from our ship.

THE KNIGHT

So you believe that the wicked are not happy? I would like to believe it too; however, I hear every day that everything goes their way. If that were truly the case, I would be rather annoyed that Providence had reserved the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous entirely for another world: it seems to me that a small advance on both sides in this very life would not have spoiled anything. This is what made me wish, at least, that the wicked, as you see, were not susceptible to certain sensations that delight us. I confess that I don't quite understand this matter. You gentlemen, who are so adept at this kind of philosophy, should tell me what you think.

For me, who was raised in the camps from my childhood,

I always left their vengeance to the heavens.

I confess that I am not very well informed about how God chooses to exercise his justice, although, to tell you the truth, it seems to me, reflecting on what is happening in the world, that if he punishes in this life, at least he is not in a hurry.

THE COUNT

If you so desire, we could very well devote the evening to examining this question, which is not difficult in itself, but which has been muddled by the sophisms of pride and its elder daughter, irreligion. I feel a great longing for those *symposia*, of which antiquity has bequeathed us some precious relics. The ladies are undoubtedly charming; one must move in their circles, or else grow boorish. Large gatherings have their price; one must even know how to participate willingly; but when all the duties imposed by custom have been fulfilled, I find it quite good that men sometimes gather to reason, even at the table. I don't know why we no longer imitate the ancients in this respect. Do you believe that examining an interesting question would not occupy the time of a meal in a more useful and even more pleasant way than the frivolous or reprehensible discourses that animate ours? It seemed to me quite a fine idea to seat Bacchus and Minerva at the same table, so as to prevent the one from turning to license and the other to pedantry. We no longer have a Bacchus, and besides, our little *symposium* expressly rejects him; but we have a Minerva far better than any of the ancients; let us invite her to tea with us: she is affable and dislikes noise; I hope she will come.

You can already see this small terrace supported by four Chinese columns above the entrance to my house: my study opens directly onto this sort of belvedere, which you might call a large balcony; it is there that, seated in an antique armchair, I peacefully await sleep. Struck twice by lightning, as you know, I have no right to what is commonly called *happiness*: I confess that before I had strengthened myself through salutary reflection, I too often found myself asking: *What is left for me?* But conscience, by constantly answering ME, has made me blush with my weakness, and for a long time now I haven't even been tempted to complain. It is there, above all, in my observatory, that I find delightful moments. Sometimes I indulge in sublime meditations: the state to which they gradually lead me borders on rapture. Sometimes, like an innocent magician, I conjure up venerable shades who were once earthly deities to me, and whom I now invoke as guardian spirits. Often it seems to me that they beckon to me; but when I rush towards them, charming memories remind me of what I still possess, and life appears as beautiful as if I were still in the age of hope.

When my troubled heart cries out for rest, reading comes to my aid. All my books are there at my fingertips: I need few, for I have long been convinced of the utter uselessness of a host of works that still enjoy a great reputation...

The three friends having arrived and taken their places around the tea table, the conversation resumed its course.

THE SENATOR

I am delighted that a remark by Monsieur le Chevalier has given us the idea of a philosophical *symposium*. The subject we will address could not be more interesting: *the happiness of the wicked, the misfortune of the righteous!* This is the great scandal of human reason. Could we spend an evening better than by devoting it to examining this mystery of divine metaphysics? We will be led to explore, at least as far as human weakness allows, *the entirety of Providence's workings in the governance of the moral world*. But I warn you, Monsieur le Comte, it may well happen to you, as to the Sultana *Scheherazade*, that you will not conclude her tale in just one evening: I don't mean we'll go on for *a thousand and one* evening; that would be indiscreet; but we will return to it at least more often than you imagine.

THE COUNT

I take what you say as a courtesy, not a threat. Furthermore, gentlemen, I can dismiss either of you, as you put it. I neither ask for nor even accept a primary role in our discussions; we will, if you so wish, share our thoughts: I will only begin on that condition.

Gentlemen, people have long complained about Providence in the distribution of good and evil; but I confess that these difficulties have never made the slightest impression on my mind. I see with an intuitive certainty, and I humbly thank Providence for it, that on this point man is in error in the fullest sense of the word and in the natural meaning of the expression.

I wish I could say, like Montaigne: *"Man deceives himself*," for that is the true word. Yes, undoubtedly man deceives himself; he is duped by himself; he mistakes the sophistries of a heart naturally in revolt (alas! nothing is more certain) for genuine doubts arising in the intellect. If sometimes superstition *believes it believes*, as it has been accused of doing, even more often, rest assured, *pride flatters itself that it disbelieves*. It is always man who *deceives himself*; but, in the second case, it is far worse.

Finally, gentlemen, there is no subject on which I feel stronger than that of the temporal government of Providence: it is therefore with perfect conviction, with delightful satisfaction, that I will expound to two men whom I love tenderly some useful thoughts which I have gathered on the already long road of a life devoted entirely to serious studies.

THE KNIGHT

I will listen to you with the greatest pleasure, and I have no doubt that our mutual friend will give you the same attention; but allow me, I beg you, to begin by chiding you before you have even begun, and do not accuse me of *answering before you speak*; for it is just as if you had already spoken, and I know very well what you are going to tell me. You are, without the slightest doubt, about to begin where preachers end, *with eternal life*. “The wicked are happy in this world; but they will be tormented in the next: the righteous, on the contrary, suffer in this one; but they will be happy in the next.” That is what one finds everywhere. And why should I hide from you that this sharp answer does not entirely satisfy me? You will not suspect me, I hope, of wanting to destroy or weaken this great proof; but it seems to me that it would not be harmed at all by associating it with others.

THE SENATOR

If Monsieur le Chevalier is indiscreet or too hasty, I confess that I am as wrong as he is; for I was about to quarrel with you myself before you had even broached the subject. Or, if you wish me to speak more seriously, I wanted to ask you to think outside the box. I have read several of your first-rate ascetic writers, whom I revere immensely; but, while giving them the credit they deserve, I find it difficult to see that, on this great question of the ways of divine justice in this world, they almost all seem to pass judgment on the matter and agree that there is no way to justify divine Providence in this life. If this proposition is not false, it seems to me at least extremely dangerous; for there is great danger in letting people believe that virtue will only be rewarded and vice punished in the next life. The credulous, for whom this world is everything, ask for nothing better, and the masses themselves must be placed in the same category: man is so distracted, so dependent on the objects that impress him, so dominated by his passions, that we see every day even the most submissive believer braving the torments of the afterlife for the most wretched pleasure. What will become of him who does not believe or who believes weakly? Let us therefore press as much as you like on the afterlife, which answers all objections; but if a true moral government exists in this world, and if, even in this life, crime must tremble, why relieve it of this fear?

THE COUNT

Pascal observes somewhere that *the last thing one discovers in composing a book is what should have come first*: I am not making a book, my good friends; but I am beginning a discourse which may be long, and I could have hesitated on the beginning: fortunately, you spare me the work of deliberation; it is you yourselves who teach me where I should begin.

The familiar expression, which one can only address to a child or an inferior, "*you don't know what you're saying*," is nevertheless the rebuke [or observation] a sensible man is entitled to make to the crowd that presumes to discuss the thorny questions of philosophy. Have you ever heard, gentlemen, a soldier complain that in war, blows only fall on honest men, and that it suffices to be a scoundrel to be invulnerable? I am sure you haven't, because indeed everyone knows that bullets strike without distinction. I would be perfectly justified in establishing at least a perfect parity between the evils of war with respect to soldiers, and the evils of life in general with respect to all men; and this parity, assuming it to be exact, would alone suffice to eliminate a difficulty founded on a manifest falsehood. For it is not only false, but obviously FALSE, *that crime is generally fortunate and virtue unfortunate in this world*: on the contrary, it is perfectly clear that good and evil are a kind of lottery where

everyone, without distinction, can draw a white or black lot. The question should therefore be changed, and we should ask *why, in the temporal order, the righteous are not exempt from the evils that can afflict the guilty; and why the wicked are not deprived of the goods that the righteous can enjoy?* But this question is quite different from the other, and I am even quite surprised if the mere statement of it does not demonstrate its absurdity to you; for it is a cherished conviction of mine that the man of integrity is usually alerted by an interior sense to the truth or falsehood of certain propositions before any examination, often even without having undertaken the necessary studies to be able to examine them with perfect knowledge of the facts.

THE SENATOR

I am so convinced of your opinion and so enamored of this doctrine that I may have exaggerated it in applying it to the natural sciences; however, I can, at least to some extent, invoke experience in this regard. More than once, in matters of physics or natural history, I have been shocked, without quite knowing why, by certain widely held opinions, which I then had the pleasure (for it is a pleasure indeed) of seeing attacked, and even ridiculed, by men deeply versed in these very same sciences, in which I have little regard, as you know. Do you believe that one must be the equal of Descartes to have the right to mock his vortices? If someone tells me that this planet we inhabit is merely a splash of sunlight, swept away a few million years ago by some extravagant comet hurtling through space; or that animals make themselves into houses by placing this next to that; or that all the layers of our globe are merely the accidental result of chemical precipitation, and a hundred other such fine things that have been spouted in our century—must one have read a great deal, reflected a great deal; must one belong to four or five academies to perceive the extravagance of these theories? I go further; I believe that even in questions pertaining to the exact sciences, or which appear to rest entirely on experience, this rule of intellectual conscience is far from negligible for those who are not initiated into this kind of knowledge; which has led me to doubt, I confess, lowering my voice, several things that are generally considered certain. The explanation of tides by lunar-solar attraction, the decomposition and recomposition of water, and other theories I could mention that are now considered dogma, absolutely refuse to enter my mind, and I feel irresistibly drawn to believe that a scholar of good faith will one day come along and teach us that we were mistaken about these great subjects, or that we simply disagreed. You might say to me (friendship has the right to do so): " *That's pure ignorance on your part*." I have told myself as much a thousand times. But tell me in turn why I wouldn't be equally resistant to other truths? I believe them on the word of the masters, and never does a single idea arise in my mind *that contradicts this belief*.

Where does this inner feeling come from that rebels against certain theories? They are supported by arguments that I cannot refute, and yet this conscience we are talking about says no less: *Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi*.

THE COUNT

You speak Latin, Senator, although we do not live in a Latin country. It is very good of you to make excursions to foreign lands; but you should have added, as a matter of courtesy, " *with the permission of Monsieur le Chevalier*."

THE KNIGHT

You are jesting, Count: please know that I am not at all as unfamiliar with the language of ancient Rome as you might think. It is true that I spent the end of my youth in military camps, where Cicero is rarely quoted; but I began it in a country where education itself almost always begins with Latin. I understood the passage I just heard perfectly well, without, however, knowing to whom it belongs. Besides, I do not presume to be, on this point, nor on so many others, the equal of the Senator, whose vast and solid knowledge I greatly admire. He has every right to tell me, even with a certain emphasis:

Go, tell your nation

That some learning yet dwells upon the Scythian shores.

But allow me, gentlemen, the youngest among you to bring you back to the path from which we have so strangely strayed. I don't know how we went from Providence to Latin.

THE COUNT

Whatever the subject, my dear friend, she is always mentioned. Besides, a conversation is not a book; perhaps it is even better than a book, precisely because it allows for a little digression. But to return to our subject from which we departed, I will not examine at this moment to what extent one can rely on that inner feeling which the Senator so aptly calls *intellectual conscience*.

I will presume even less to discuss the particular examples to which he applied it; these details would take us too far afield from our subject. I will only say that uprightness of heart and habitual purity of intention can have secret influences and results that extend far beyond what is commonly imagined. I am therefore very inclined to believe that in men such as those who are listening to me, the secret instinct we were just discussing will often prove correct, even in the natural sciences; but I am led to believe it is almost infallible when it comes to rational philosophy, morality, metaphysics, and natural theology. It is infinitely worthy of supreme wisdom, which created and regulated all things, to have dispensed humankind from science in all that truly concerns them. I was therefore right to assert that, once the question before us has been precisely posed, the inner determination of every well-formed mind must necessarily anticipate the discussion.

THE KNIGHT

It seems to me that the Senator approves, since he raises no objection. As for myself, I have always held it to the principle never to argue about useful opinions. That there is a conscience for the mind as there is for the heart, that an inner feeling guides the good man and warns him against error in matters that seem to require preliminary study and reflection—this is an opinion most worthy of divine wisdom and most honorable for humankind: never to deny what is useful, never to support what could be harmful—this, in my view, is a sacred rule that should especially guide those whose profession, like mine, prevents them from pursuing in-depth studies. Therefore, do not expect any objection from me; however, without denying that my feelings have already taken a stand, I would nonetheless ask the Count to consider my reasoning further.

THE COUNT

I repeat, I have never understood this eternal argument against Providence, based on the misfortune of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. If the good man suffered because he was a good man, and if the wicked prospered likewise because he was wicked, the argument would be insoluble; it collapses if one merely supposes that good and evil are distributed indiscriminately to all men. But false opinions are like counterfeit money, first minted by great criminals and then spent by honest people who perpetuate crime without knowing what they are doing. It was *irreligion* that was the first to raise a great clamor about this objection; frivolity and good nature have repeated it: but in truth, it is nothing. I return to my first comparison: a good man is killed in war, is that an injustice? No, it is a misfortune. If he has gout or kidney stones; if his friend betrays him; If he is crushed by a falling building, etc., that is still a misfortune; but nothing more, since all men without distinction are subject to these kinds of misfortunes. Never lose sight of this great truth: *that a general law, if it is not unjust for all, cannot be unjust for the individual*. You did not have such an illness, but you could have had it; you have it, but you could have been exempt from it. He who perished in a battle could have escaped; he who returned from it could have remained there. Not all died; but all were there to die. From then on, no more injustice: the just law is not that which has its effect on all, but that which is made for all; the effect on this or that individual is now only an accident. To find difficulties in this order of things, one must love them; unfortunately, we love them and we seek them out: the human heart, continually revolted against the authority that hinders it, spins tales for the mind that believes them; We accuse Providence so as to be spared from accusing ourselves; we raise against it difficulties that we would be ashamed to raise against a sovereign or a mere administrator whose wisdom we would esteem. Strange thing! It is easier for us to be just towards men than towards God.

It seems to me, gentlemen, that I would be abusing your patience if I were to elaborate further to prove that the question is usually poorly formulated, and that *people don't really know what they're saying* when they complain that vice is fortunate and virtue unfortunate in this world; whereas, even assuming the scenario most favorable to the complainers, it is clearly proven that evils of every kind rain down on all humankind like bullets on an army, without any distinction between individuals. Now, if the good man does not suffer *because he is good*, and if the wicked man does not prosper *because he is wicked*, the objection disappears, and common sense has prevailed.

THE KNIGHT

I admit that if we stick to the distribution of physical and external evils, there is obviously inattention or bad faith in the objection that is drawn against Providence; but it seems to me that much more emphasis is placed on the impunity of crimes: that is the great scandal, and that is the article on which I am most curious to hear you.

THE COUNT

It is not yet time, Sir Knight. You have conceded my point a little too hastily regarding these evils you call *external*. If I have always assumed, as you have seen, that these evils were equally distributed among all men, I did so solely to give myself a more advantageous position later; for, in truth, this is not the case. But, before going further, let us be careful, if you please, not to stray from the path; there are questions that are, so to speak, closely related, in such a way that it is easy to slip from one to the other without realizing it: from this one, for example: *Why does the righteous suffer?* One finds oneself imperceptibly at another: *Why does man suffer?* The last, however, is quite different; it is that of the origin of evil. Let us begin, then, by dispelling all ambiguity. *Evil is on earth*; alas! This is a truth that does not need to be proven; but moreover: *It is very rightly there, and God could not be its author*: this is another truth which we do not doubt, I hope, neither you nor I, and which I can dispense with proving, for I know to whom I am speaking.

THE SENATOR

I profess with all my heart the same truth, and without any reservation; but this profession of faith, precisely because of its scope, requires explanation. Your Saint Thomas said, with that characteristic logical conciseness: " *God is the author of the evil that punishes, but not of that which defiles* . " He is certainly right in one sense; but we must understand this: God is the author of the evil *that punishes,* that is to say, of physical evil or pain, just as a sovereign is the author of the punishments inflicted under his laws. In a remote and indirect sense, it is indeed *he* who hangs and breaks on the wheel, since all authority and all legal execution originates from him; but, in the direct and immediate sense, it is the thief, the forger, the murderer, etc., who are the true authors of this *evil that punishes them*; it is they who build the prisons, who erect the gallows and the scaffolds. In all this, the sovereign acts, like Homer's Juno, *of his own free will, but very reluctantly*. The same is true of God (always excluding any rigorous comparison that would be presumptuous). Not only can he not, in any sense, be the author of moral evil, or of *sin*; but it is incomprehensible even that he could be originally the author of physical evil, which would not exist if intelligent creatures had not made it necessary by abusing their freedom. Plato said it, and nothing is more self-evident: *A good being cannot wish to harm anyone*. But since no one would ever think of arguing that a good man ceases to be so simply because he justly punishes his son, or because he kills an enemy on the battlefield, or because he sends a scoundrel to his execution, let us be careful, as you said just now, Count, not to be less equitable toward God than toward men. Every upright mind is convinced by intuition that no evil can come from an all-powerful Being. It was this infallible feeling that once taught Roman common sense to unite, as if by a necessary bond, the two august titles of MOST GOOD and MOST GREAT. This magnificent expression, though born in the bosom of paganism, seemed so apt that it has passed into your religious language, so delicate and exclusive. I will even tell you in passing that it has happened to me more than once to think that the ancient inscription IOVI OPTIMO MAXIMO could be placed entirely on the pediment of your Latin temples; for what is IOV-I, if not IOV-AH [3]?

THE COUNT

You can well imagine that I have no desire to argue about everything you've just said. Undoubtedly, *physical evil could only have entered the universe through the fault of free creatures; it can only exist as a remedy or expiation, and consequently, it cannot have God as its direct author*; these are indisputable dogmas for us. Now I return to you, Sir. You agreed earlier that Providence is being unfairly quibbled over regarding the distribution of good and evil, but that the scandal lies primarily in the impunity of the wicked. I doubt, however, that you can abandon the first objection without abandoning the second, for if there is no injustice in the distribution of evils, on what will you base the complaints of virtue? Since the world is governed only by general laws, you do not, I believe, presume that if the foundations of the terrace where we are speaking were suddenly undermined by some subterranean shift, God would be obliged to suspend the laws of gravity in our favor, because this terrace is currently supporting three men who have never killed or stolen; we would certainly fall and be crushed. The same would be true if we had been members of the Bavarian Illuminati lodge or the Committee of Public Safety. Would you expect the field of the righteous to be spared when it hails? That would be a miracle. But if, by chance, this righteous man were to commit a crime after the harvest, it would still have to rot in his barns: that would be another miracle. So, if every moment required a miracle, the miracle would become the ordinary state of the world; that is to say, there could no longer be any miracles; the exception would become the rule, and disorder order. To put forward such ideas is to refute them sufficiently.

What still often deceives us on this point is that we cannot help but unwittingly attribute to God the ideas we hold about the dignity and importance of individuals. In relation to ourselves, these ideas are quite accurate, since we are all subject to the established order of society; but when we apply them to the general order, we resemble that queen who said: " *When it comes to damning people of our kind, believe that God considers it more than once*." Elisabeth of France mounts the scaffold: Robespierre mounts it a moment later. Both the angel and the monster submitted, upon entering the world, to all the general laws that govern it. No expression can adequately characterize the crime of the scoundrels who shed the purest and most august blood in the universe; however, in relation to the general order, there is no injustice. It is always a misfortune inherent in the human condition, and nothing more. *Every man, by virtue of being human, is subject to all the misfortunes of humanity*: the law is universal; therefore, it is not unjust. To claim that a man's dignity or dignities should exempt him from the action of an unjust or deceived tribunal is precisely to want them to exempt him from apoplexy, for example, or even from death.

Observe, however, that despite these general and necessary laws, the supposed equality, on which I have insisted until now, is far from actually existing. I assumed it, as I told you, *to give myself a better argument*; but nothing could be further from the truth, and you will see why.

First, never consider the individual: the general law, the visible and demonstrably just law, is *that the greatest amount of happiness, even temporal happiness, belongs not to the virtuous person, but to virtue itself*. If it were otherwise, there would be neither vice nor virtue, neither merit nor demerit, and consequently no moral order. Suppose that every virtuous action were *rewarded*, so to speak, with some temporal advantage; the act, having lost its supernatural quality, could no longer merit such a reward. Suppose, on the other hand, that by virtue of a divine law, a thief's hand were to fall at the very moment he committed theft, one would refrain from stealing as one would refrain from putting one's hand under a butcher's axe; the moral order would disappear entirely. To reconcile this order (the only one possible for intelligent beings, and one which is, moreover, proven by fact) with the laws of justice, virtue had to be rewarded and vice punished, even if only temporarily, but not always, nor immediately; the incomparably greater share of temporal happiness had to be allotted to virtue, and the proportional share of unhappiness to vice; but the individual could never be certain of anything: and this is indeed what has been established. Imagine any other hypothesis; it will lead you directly to the destruction of the moral order, or to the creation of another world.

Now, to get to the details, let us begin, I pray you, with human justice. God, having willed that men should be governed by men, at least outwardly, entrusted to sovereigns the preeminent prerogative of punishing crimes, and it is above all in this that they are his representatives. I found an admirable passage on this subject in the Laws of Manu; allow me to read it to you from the third volume of the *Works of Sir William Jones*, which is here on my table.

THE KNIGHT

Please read; but first, be so kind as to tell me who King Manu is, to whom I have never had the honor of being presented.

THE COUNT

Manu, Sir, is the great legislator of India. Some say he is the son of the Sun, others that he is the son of Brahma, the first person of the Indian Trinity. Between these two equally probable opinions, I remain suspended without hope of deciding. Unfortunately, it is also impossible for me to tell you when either of these two fathers begot Manu. Sir Jones, of learned memory, believes that this legislator's code is perhaps earlier than the Pentateuch, and *certainly* at least earlier than all the legislators of Greece. But Mr. Pinkerton, who also has some right to our confidence, has taken the liberty of mocking the Brahmins and has thought himself capable of proving to them that Manu might very well have been nothing more than an honest jurist of the 13th century. It is not my custom to argue over such slight differences; So, gentlemen, I am going to read you the piece in question, the date of which we will leave blank: listen carefully.

“Brahma, at the beginning of time, created for the use of kings the spirit of punishment, giving it a body of pure light: this spirit is his son; it is justice itself and the protector of all created things. Through the fear of this spirit, all sentient beings, whether moving or immobile, are restrained from the pursuit of their natural pleasures and do not stray from their duty. Therefore, let the king, when he has duly and properly considered the place, the time, his own strength, and divine law, inflict punishments justly upon all those who act unjustly: punishment is an active governor; it is the true administrator of public affairs, it is the dispenser of laws, and wise men call it the *guarantor* of the four estates, ensuring the precise fulfillment of their duties. Punishment governs all humanity; punishment preserves it; punishment watches over it while human guards sleep.” The wise man considers punishment the perfection of justice. If an indolent monarch ceases to punish, the strongest will eventually roast the weakest. The entire human race is kept in order by punishment; for innocence is scarcely found, and it is the fear of punishment that allows the universe to enjoy the happiness destined for it. All classes would be corrupted, all barriers would be broken: there would be only confusion among men if punishment ceased to be inflicted or was inflicted unjustly. But when Punishment, with its dark complexion and fiery eye, advances to destroy crime, the people are saved if the judge has a just eye.

THE SENATOR

Admirable! Magnificent! You are an excellent man for having unearthed this piece of Indian philosophy for us: in truth, the date does not matter.

THE COUNT

It made the same impression on me. I find in it the European reason with a just measure of that oriental emphasis which pleases everyone when it is not exaggerated: I do not believe that it is possible to express with more nobility and energy this divine and terrible prerogative of sovereigns: *The punishment of the guilty.*

But allow me, warned by these sad expressions, to draw your attention for a moment to an object which undoubtedly shocks the mind, but which is nevertheless very worthy of occupying it.

From this formidable prerogative I spoke of earlier results the necessary existence of a man destined to inflict punishments for crimes as decreed by human justice; and this man, in fact, is found everywhere, without any way of explaining how; for reason discovers in the nature of man no motive capable of determining the choice of this profession.

I believe you gentlemen are too accustomed to reflection not to have often pondered the executioner. What is this inexplicable being who has preferred, to all the pleasant, lucrative, honest, and even honorable professions that present themselves in abundance to human strength or dexterity, that of tormenting and putting to death his fellow human beings? Is his head, his heart, made like ours? Do they contain nothing particular and foreign to our nature? For my part, I cannot doubt it. He is made outwardly like us; he is born like us; but he is an extraordinary being, and for him to exist within the human family requires a special decree, a FIAT from the creative power. He is

created like a world. Consider what he is in the eyes of men, and understand, if you can, how he can ignore this opinion or defy it! No sooner had the authorities designated his dwelling, no sooner had he taken possession of it, than the other houses retreated until they could no longer see his. It is in the midst of this solitude and this kind of void formed around him that he lives alone with his mate and her offspring, who make him acquainted with the voice of man: without them, he would know only groans... A mournful signal is given; an abject minister of justice comes to knock on his door and warn him that he is needed: he leaves; he arrives in a public square covered with a pressing and trembling crowd. A poisoner, a parricide, a sacrilege, is thrown at him: he seizes him, he stretches him out, he binds him to a horizontal cross, he raises his arm: then there is a horrible silence, and one hears nothing but the cry of bones bursting under the bar, and the screams of the victim. He unties her; He carries her on a wheel: her shattered limbs become entangled in the spokes; her head hangs; her hair bristles, and her mouth, open like a furnace, sends forth only a few bloody words that call for death. He has finished: his heart beats, but with joy; he applauds himself, he says to himself: *No one is better than I at breaking on the wheel*. He gets off: he holds out his blood-stained hand, and justice throws a few gold coins into it from afar, which he carries off through a double hedge of men parted in horror. He sits down at the table, and he eats; then to bed, and he sleeps. And the next day, upon waking, he thinks of something entirely different from what he did the day before. Is he a man? Yes: God receives him in his temples and allows him to pray. He is not a criminal; However, no language would agree to say, for example, *that he is virtuous, that he is an honest man, that he is estimable*, etc. No moral praise can suit him; for all presuppose relationships with men, and he has none.

And yet all grandeur, all power, all subordination rests upon the executor: he is the horror and the bond of human association. Remove this incomprehensible agent from the world; in that very instant, order gives way to chaos, thrones crumble, and society disappears.

God, who is the author of sovereignty, is therefore also the author of punishment: he has thrown our earth upon these two poles; *for Jehovah is the master of the two poles, and upon them he makes the world turn*.

Thus, within the temporal realm, there exists a divine and visible law for the punishment of crime; and this law, as stable as the society it sustains, has been invariably executed since the beginning of time: evil being on earth, it acts constantly; and by a necessary consequence, it must be constantly repressed by punishment; and indeed, we see throughout the globe the constant action of all governments to arrest or punish the acts of crime: the sword of justice has no sheath; it must always threaten or strike. What, then, is meant when one complains of the *impunity of crime*? For whom are the whip, the gallows, the wheel, and the stake? For crime, apparently. The errors of the courts are exceptions that do not shake the rule: I have, moreover, several reflections to offer you on this point. Firstly, these fatal errors are far less frequent than one might imagine: public opinion, if doubt is even permitted, is always contrary to authority, and the public eagerly welcomes the slightest rumors suggesting a judicial murder; a thousand individual passions may join this general inclination; but I attest to your long experience, Senator; it is exceedingly rare for a court to commit homicide out of passion or error. You laugh, Sir!

THE KNIGHT

It was because at that moment I thought of the Calas; and the Calas made me think *of the horse and the whole stable* 5. That is how ideas follow one another, and how imagination never ceases to interrupt reason.

THE COUNT

Don't apologize, for you are doing me a favor by reminding me of that famous judgment which provides proof of what I was telling you just now. Nothing could be less proven, gentlemen, I assure you, than Calas's innocence. There are a thousand reasons to doubt it, and even to believe the contrary; but nothing has struck me as much as an original letter from Voltaire to the celebrated Tronchin of Geneva, which I read at my leisure a few years ago. In the midst of the most animated public debate, where Voltaire presented himself and styled himself the guardian of innocence and the avenger of humanity, he was clowning around in this letter as if he were discussing comic opera. I especially remember this sentence which struck me: " *You found my memoir too heated, but I am preparing another one for you* at the Bain-Marie." It was in this grave and sentimental style that the worthy man spoke in the ear of a man in whom he had confidence, while Europe resounded with his fanatical *Trénodies*.

But let us leave *Calas* aside. That an innocent person should perish is a misfortune like any other, that is to say, common to all humankind. That a guilty person should escape is another exception of the same kind. But it remains true, generally speaking, *that there is on earth a universal and visible order for the temporal punishment of crimes*; and I must also point out to you that the guilty do not deceive the eye of justice nearly as often as one might believe if one listened only to theory, given the infinite precautions they take to conceal themselves. There is often, in the circumstances that expose the most skillful scoundrels, something so unexpected, so surprising, so *unforeseeable*, that those who, called by their station or by their reflections to follow these kinds of cases, feel inclined to believe that human justice is not entirely devoid, in the search for the guilty, of a certain extraordinary assistance.

Allow me to add one more consideration to conclude this chapter on punishments. Since it is quite possible that we are mistaken when we accuse human justice of sparing a guilty person because the one we consider so is not truly guilty, it is equally possible, on the other hand, that a man sent to his death for a crime he did not commit may have actually deserved it through another, entirely unknown crime. Fortunately and unfortunately, there are several examples of this kind proven by the confessions of the guilty; and there are, I believe, even more that we are unaware of. This latter supposition deserves particular attention; for although the judges in this case may be greatly guilty or unfortunate, Providence, for whom everything is a means, even an obstacle, has nonetheless made use of crime or ignorance to execute the temporal justice we demand; and it is certain that both suppositions significantly reduce the number of exceptions. So you see how much this supposed equality that I had initially assumed is already disturbed by the mere consideration of human justice.

From these corporal punishments she inflicts, let us now turn to diseases. You have already warned me. If intemperance of all kinds were removed from the universe, most diseases, and perhaps even all, would be banished. This is something everyone can generally observe, albeit vaguely; but it is worth examining the matter closely. If there were no moral evil on earth, there would be no physical evil; and since countless diseases are the immediate result of certain disorders, is it not true that analogy leads us to generalize the observation? Do you happen to have Seneca's vigorous and sometimes rather distasteful tirade on the diseases of his century? It is interesting to see the era of Nero marked by an abundance of ills unknown in the times that preceded it. He exclaimed jokingly, "Would you be surprised by this countless number of illnesses? Just count the cooks!" He was particularly angry with women: "Hippocrates," he said, "the oracle of medicine, said that women are not prone to gout. He was undoubtedly right in his time; today he would be wrong. But since they have shed their own sex to don the other, let them be condemned to share all the ills of the one whose vices they have adopted. *May heaven curse them for the infamous usurpation these wretches have dared to make upon ours!"* “There are undoubtedly diseases that are, as cannot be stressed enough, merely the accidental results of a general law: the most moral man must die; and two men who make a forced run, one to save his fellow man and the other to murder him, can both die of pleurisy; but what a frightening number of diseases in general and particular accidents are due solely to our vices! I recall that Bossuet, preaching before Louis XIV and his entire court, called upon medicine as a witness to the fatal consequences of lust. He was quite right to cite what was most evident and striking; but he would have been justified in generalizing the observation; and for my part, I cannot deny the opinion of a new apologist who has maintained that all diseases have their source in some vice proscribed by the Gospel; that this holy law contains the true medicine of the body as well as that of the soul; So that, in a just society that made use of it, death would be nothing more than the inevitable end of a healthy and robust old age; an opinion which, I believe, was that of Origen. What deceives us on this point is that when the effect is not immediate, we no longer perceive it; but it is no less real. Diseases, once established, spread, intersect, and combine through a fatal affinity; so that we may bear today the physical punishment of an excess committed more than a century ago. However, despite the confusion that results from these dreadful mixtures, the analogy between crimes and diseases is visible to any attentive observer. There are evils just as there are *actual* and *original* crimes, *accidental* and *habitual*, *mortal* and *venial*. There are diseases of sloth, anger, gluttony, incontinence, and so on. Furthermore, observe that some crimes have specific characteristics, and consequently distinctive names in every language, such as murder, sacrilege, incest, etc.; and others that can only be designated by general terms, such as fraud, injustice, violence, embezzlement, etc. Similarly, some diseases have specific characteristics, such as dropsy, tuberculosis, apoplexy, etc.; and others can only be designated by the general terms of ailments, discomforts, pains, *unnamed* fevers, etc. Now, the more virtuous a person is, the more protected they are from diseases *that have names*.

Bacon, though a Protestant, could not help but observe the great number of saints (especially monks and hermits) whom God favored with long lives; and the contrary observation is no less striking, since there is not a vice, not a crime, not a disordered passion that does not produce a more or less disastrous, more or less distant, effect in the physical realm. A beautiful analogy between illnesses and crimes is drawn from the fact that the divine Author of our Religion, who was indeed the master, in order to justify his mission in the eyes of men, of igniting volcanoes or making lightning strike, but who never deviated from the laws of nature except to do good to men; that this divine Master, I say, before healing the sick who were brought to him, never failed to forgive their sins, or deigned to give public testimony himself to the living faith which had reconciled them 6: and what is more striking than what he said to the leper: “You see that I have healed you; take care now not to sin again, lest something worse happen to you?”

It even seems that we are led to penetrate this great secret in some way if we reflect on a truth whose very statement is proof enough for anyone who knows anything about philosophy, namely: "That no illness can have a material cause." However, although reason, revelation, and experience combine to convince us of the fatal link that exists between moral and physical evil, not only do we refuse to perceive the material consequences of those passions that reside only in the soul, but we also fail to adequately examine, by far, the ravages of those that have their roots in the physical organs, and whose visible consequences should terrify us even more. A thousand times, for example, we have repeated the old adage *that food kills more people than war*; but very few people reflect deeply enough on the immense truth of this axiom. If everyone were to examine themselves rigorously, they would remain convinced that they perhaps eat half as much as they should. From excess in quantity, move on to abuses of quality: examine in all its details this perfidious art of arousing a deceptive appetite that kills us; consider the countless whims of intemperance, these seductive concoctions that are to our bodies precisely what bad books are to our minds, which are simultaneously overloaded and corrupted by them; and you will clearly see how nature, continually attacked by these vile excesses, struggles in vain against our constant assaults; and how, despite its marvelous resources, it must finally succumb and receive within us the seeds of a thousand evils. Philosophy alone had long since divined that all of human wisdom was contained in two words: SUSTINE AND ABSTINE. And although this weak legislator is ridiculed, even by her best laws, because she lacks the power to enforce obedience, nevertheless, we must be fair and acknowledge the truths she has proclaimed; she understood perfectly well that since man's strongest inclinations are so vicious that they clearly tend toward the destruction of society, he had no greater enemy than himself, and that, once he had learned to conquer himself, he knew everything .But Christian law, which is nothing but the revealed will of the One who knows all and can do all, does not limit itself to vain advice: it makes abstinence in general, or the habitual victory won over our desires, a fundamental precept that must govern the whole of human life; and moreover, it makes the more or less severe, more or less frequent deprivation of the pleasures of the table, even when permitted, a fundamental law that may well be modified according to circumstances, but which always remains invariable in its essence. If we wished to reason about this deprivation that it calls *fasting*, and considering it in a spiritual way, it would suffice for us to listen to and understand the Church when it says to God, with the infallibility it has received: *You use bodily abstinence to raise our spirits to you, to repress our vices, to give us virtues that you can* reward. But I do not wish to stray from the temporal realm just yet: I have often reflected with admiration, even gratitude, on that salutary law which opposes legal and periodic abstinence to the destructive action that intemperance continually exerts on our organs, and which at least prevents this force from becoming accelerating by compelling it to begin anew each time. Never was anything wiser conceived, even from the standpoint of simple hygiene; never was the temporal advantage of man better reconciled with his higher interests and needs.

THE SENATOR

You have just pointed out one of the great sources of physical evil, and the one that alone largely justifies Providence in its temporal ways, when we dare to judge it in this respect; but the most unbridled passion, the one dearest to human nature, is also the one that should most attract our attention, since it alone pours more evils upon the earth than all the other vices combined. We abhor murder; but what are all murders put together, and even war, compared to vice, which is like the evil principle, *homicidal from the beginning* , which acts upon the possible, kills what does not yet exist, and ceaselessly watches over the sources of life to impoverish or defile them? As there must always be in the world, by virtue of its present constitution, an immense conspiracy to justify, to embellish, I almost said, to consecrate this vice, there is none against which the holy pages have amassed more

temporal anathemas. The Sage, with redoubled wisdom, denounces the disastrous consequences of *sinful nights*; and if we look around us with pure and well-directed eyes, nothing prevents us from observing the undeniable fulfillment of these anathemas. Human reproduction, which on the one hand brings us closer to the brute, elevates us, on the other, to pure intelligence through the laws that surround this great mystery of nature, and through the sublime participation granted to those who have made themselves worthy. But how terrible is the sanction of these laws! If we could clearly perceive all the evils that result from disordered generations and the countless profanations of the world's first law, we would recoil in horror. This is why the only true Religion is also the only one that, without being able to tell humanity everything, has nevertheless taken hold of marriage and subjected it to sacred ordinances. I even believe that its legislation on this point should be considered among the most compelling proofs of its divinity. The sages of antiquity, though lacking the enlightenment we possess, were nevertheless closer to the origin of things, and some remnants of primitive traditions had been passed down to them; thus we see that they had given considerable thought to this important subject. For not only did they believe that moral and physical vices were transmitted from fathers to children, but, as a natural consequence of this belief, they warned people to carefully examine the state of their souls when they seemed to obey only material laws. What would they not have said had they known what man is and what his will is capable of! Let men, therefore, blame only themselves for most of the evils that befall them: they suffer justly what they will, in turn, inflict upon others. Our children will bear the penalty for our sins; our fathers have avenged them in advance. 10.

THE KNIGHT

Do you realize, my respectable friend, that if you were overheard by certain men I know, they might very well accuse you of being delusional?

THE SENATOR

If these men you mention were paying me the compliment literally, I would sincerely thank them; for there would be nothing happier or more honorable than to be truly *enlightened*; but that is not what you mean. In any case, if I am enlightened, I am certainly not one of those we were just discussing; for my *enlightenment* surely does not come from them. Moreover, if the nature of our studies sometimes leads us to peruse the works of some extraordinary men, you yourself have provided me with a sure rule to avoid going astray, a rule to which you told us, just a moment ago, Monsieur le Chevalier, that you constantly subject your conduct. This rule is that of general unity. When an opinion does not contradict any recognized truth, and when it also tends to elevate humanity, to perfect it, to make it master of its passions, I see no reason why we should reject it. Can a man be too imbued with his spiritual dignity? He certainly cannot be mistaken in believing that it is of the utmost importance never to act in matters entrusted to his power as a blind instrument of Providence, but rather as an intelligent, free, and submissive minister, with the prior and determined will to obey the plans of the one who sends him. If he is mistaken about the extent of the effects he attributes to this will, it must be admitted that he is quite innocently mistaken, and I dare say, quite fortunately mistaken.

THE COUNT

I wholeheartedly accept this rule of utility, which is common to all men; but we have another, you and I, Sir, which protects us from all error: the rule of authority. Let them say, let them write what they will; our fathers have dropped anchor, let us hold fast to it, and fear the fanatics no more than the impious. Leaving aside, moreover, from this discussion everything that could be considered hypothetical, I will always be within my rights to posit this undeniable principle: *that moral vices can increase the number and intensity of illnesses to a point that is impossible to define; and conversely, that this hideous reign of physical evil can be restrained by virtue, to limits that are equally impossible to fix*. Since there is not the slightest doubt about the truth of this proposition, nothing more is needed to justify the ways of Providence even in the temporal order, especially if this consideration is combined with that of human justice, since it has been demonstrated that, in this dual respect, the privilege of virtue is incalculable, independently of any appeal to reason, and even of any religious consideration. Do you now wish us to leave the temporal order?

THE KNIGHT

I'm getting so bored on Earth that you wouldn't upset me if you were so kind as to transport me a little higher. If so...

THE SENATOR

I object to traveling tonight. The pleasure of conversation seduces us, and the day deceives us; for midnight has struck. Let us therefore go to bed trusting only our watches, and tomorrow let us be true to our appointment.

THE COUNT

You are right: men of our age should, at this time of year, prescribe themselves a night's rest to ensure a peaceful sleep, just as they should create an artificial day in winter to facilitate their work. As for Monsieur le Chevalier, nothing prevents him, after leaving his serious friends, from enjoying himself in high society. He will no doubt find more than one house where dinner is not yet served.

THE KNIGHT

I will take your advice, provided, however, that you will grant me the fairness of believing that I am far from certain I will find as much enjoyment *in this fine world* as I do here. But tell me, before we part, whether good and evil might not, by chance, be distributed in the world like day and night. Today we light candles only for show; in six months we will barely extinguish them. In Quito, they are lit and extinguished every day at the same hour. Between these two extremes, day and night lengthen from the equator to the pole, and in the opposite direction in an invariable order; but, at the end of the year, everyone has had their fill, and every man has received his 4,380 hours of day and as many of night. What do you think, Count?

THE COUNT

We'll talk about it tomorrow.

END OF THE FIRST INTERVIEW

SECOND INTERVIEW

THE COUNT

You turn your cup, sir knight: do you not want any more tea?

THE KNIGHT

No, thank you, I'll limit myself to just one cup for today. Raised, as you know, in a southern province of France, where tea was considered merely a remedy for colds, I have since lived among people who make extensive use of this beverage. So I began to drink it to do as others do, but without ever finding enough pleasure in it to make it a habit. Besides, I am not, by default, a great advocate of these new drinks: who knows if they haven't brought us new diseases?

THE SENATOR

This could be the case, without the sum of evils on earth having increased; for supposing that the cause you indicate had produced some new diseases or inconveniences, which would seem to me rather difficult to prove,

one would also have to take into account the diseases that have considerably weakened, or even disappeared almost entirely, such as leprosy, elephantiasis, ergotism, etc. Moreover, I am not at all inclined to believe that tea, coffee, and sugar, which have made such a prodigious fortune in Europe, were given to us as punishments: I would rather consider them gifts; but, in one way or another, I will never regard them as indifferent. There is no such thing as chance in the world, and I have long suspected that the communication of food and drink among men is related, directly or indirectly, to some secret work that takes place in the world without our knowledge. For any person with sound eyes who wishes to observe, there is nothing so visible as the connection between the two worlds; one could even say, strictly speaking, that there is only one world, for matter is nothing. Try, if you please, to imagine matter existing alone, without intelligence; you will never succeed.

THE COUNT

I also believe that no one can deny the mutual relations between the visible and invisible worlds. This results in a twofold way of considering them; for each can be considered either in itself or in its relation to the other. It was according to this natural division that I approached the question before us yesterday. I initially considered only the purely temporal order; and I then asked permission to rise to a higher level, when I was very aptly interrupted by the Senator. Today I continue.

Since all evil is a punishment, it follows that no evil can be considered necessary, and since no evil is necessary, it follows that all evil can be prevented either by the removal of the crime that made it necessary, or by prayer, which has the power to prevent or mitigate punishment. The dominion of physical evil can therefore still be indefinitely restricted by this supernatural means, you see...

THE KNIGHT

Allow me to interrupt you, and perhaps be a little impolite, if need be, to force you to be clearer. You touch upon a subject that has troubled me more than once; but for the moment I will suspend my questions on this point. I would simply like to point out that you are confusing, if I am not mistaken, the sufferings directly caused by the faults of the one who suffers them with those we inherit. You said *that we may be suffering today for excesses committed more than a century ago*; but it seems to me that we should not be held accountable for these crimes, as for those of our parents. I do not believe that the law extends that far; and, if I am not mistaken, original sin is quite enough, since this sin alone has subjected us to all the miseries of this life. It therefore seems to me that the physical ailments we inherit have nothing to do with the temporal governance of Providence.

THE COUNT

Please note, I beg you, that I have not at all dwelt upon this unfortunate hereditary trait, nor have I presented it to you as direct proof of the justice that Providence exercises in this world. I mentioned it in passing, as an observation that came to mind; but I thank you from the bottom of my heart, my dear knight, for bringing it up again, for it is most worthy of our attention. If I made no distinction between illnesses, it is because they are all punishments. Original sin, which explains everything, and without which nothing can be explained, unfortunately repeats itself at every moment of time, albeit in a secondary way. I do not believe that, as a Christian, this idea, when it is fully explained to you, will be anything but shocking to your understanding. Original sin is undoubtedly a mystery; however, if one examines it closely, it turns out that this mystery, like others, has aspects that are plausible, even to our limited intellect. Let us leave aside the theological question of *imputation*, which remains unresolved, and confine ourselves to this common observation, which so readily aligns with our most natural ideas: *that any being capable of propagation can only produce a being like itself*. The rule admits of no exception; it is written on all parts of the universe. Therefore, if a being is degraded, its offspring will no longer resemble that being's original state, but rather the state to which it has been reduced by some cause. This is perfectly understandable, and the rule applies in the physical order as well as the moral order. But it must be clearly observed that there is the same difference between an *infirm person and a sick* person as there is between a vicious person and a *guilty* one. Acute illness is not transmissible; but that which corrupts the humors becomes *a disease of origin* and can spoil an entire race. The same is true of illnesses. Some belong to the ordinary state of human imperfection; but there are certain acts of transgression, or consequences of transgression, that can utterly degrade

a person. This is *original sin.*of the second order, but which represents to us, albeit imperfectly, the first. From this come the savages who have inspired so many extravagant pronouncements and who, above all, served as the eternal text for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the most dangerous sophists of his century, and yet the most devoid of true knowledge, sagacity, and above all, depth—with an apparent depth that lies entirely in the words. He constantly mistook the savage for primitive man, whereas he is and can only be the descendant of a man severed from the great tree of civilization by some transgression, but of a kind that can no longer be repeated, as far as I am permitted to judge; for I doubt that new savages will ever be formed.

Following the same error, the languages of these savages were mistaken for languages in their infancy, whereas they are and can only be remnants of ancient languages, *ruined*, if I may put it that way, and degraded like the men who speak them. Indeed, every individual or national degradation is immediately heralded by a rigorously proportional degradation in language. How could a man lose an idea, or even the correctness of an idea, without losing the ability or the precision of the language that expresses it? And how, on the contrary, could he think, more or less, without immediately manifesting it through his language?

Thus, there is an *original disease* just as there is original sin; that is to say, by virtue of this primal degradation, we are subject to all kinds of physical suffering *in general*, just as by virtue of this same degradation we are subject to all kinds of vices *in general*. This original disease, therefore, has no other name. It is simply the capacity to suffer all evils, just as original sin (leaving aside the imputation) is simply the capacity to commit all crimes, which completes the parallel.

But there are also diseases, just as there are original sins of the second order; that is to say, certain sins committed by certain men may have degraded them to a *greater or lesser* degree, and thus perpetuated vices and diseases to a greater or lesser extent in their descendants. It may be that these great sins are no longer possible; but it remains no less true that the general principle persists and that the Christian religion has shown itself to possess great secrets when it turned its principal concern and all the force of its legislative and educational power toward the legitimate reproduction of man, to prevent any harmful transmission from fathers to sons. If I have spoken without distinction of the diseases that we owe directly to our personal crimes and those that we inherit from the vices of our fathers, the error is slight since, as I told you just now, they are all, in truth, merely the punishments for a crime. It is only this heredity that initially offends human reason; but until we can discuss it at greater length, let us content ourselves with the general rule I first mentioned, *that any being that reproduces can only produce its own kind*. It is here, Senator, that I appeal to your *intellectual conscience*: if a man has committed such crimes, or such a series of crimes, that they are capable of altering his moral principles, you understand that this degradation is transmissible, just as you understand the transmission of scrofula or syphilis. Besides, I have no need of these hereditary afflictions. Consider, if you will, everything I have said on this subject as a parenthesis in conversation; everything else remains unshakeable. Having considered all the points I have presented to you, I hope you will be left with no doubt *that when the innocent suffer, they suffer only in their capacity as human beings; and that the vast majority of evils are attributable to crime*; which would be sufficient for me. Now...

THE KNIGHT

It would be quite pointless, at least for me, for you to go any further; for since you spoke of savages, I have stopped listening to you. You mentioned, in passing, a word about this species of man that occupies my entire attention. Would you be able to prove to me that the languages of savages are remnants, and not *rudimentary* languages?

THE COUNT

If I were to seriously undertake this proof, Sir, I would first try to demonstrate that it would be up to you to prove the contrary; but I fear embarking on such a digression, which would take us too far afield. If, however, the importance of the subject seems to you to merit at least that I present *my position*, I will gladly and without detail offer it to your future consideration. Here, then, is what I believe on the principal points, the mere consequence of which has captured your attention.

The essence of all intelligence is to know and to love. The limits of its knowledge are those of its nature. The immortal being learns nothing: it knows by nature all that it needs to know. On the other hand, no intelligent being

can love evil naturally or by virtue of its essence; for that to happen, God would have to have created it evil, which is impossible. If, therefore, humankind is subject to ignorance and evil, it can only be by virtue of an accidental degradation that can only be the consequence of a crime. This need, this hunger for knowledge, which stirs within humankind, is merely the natural tendency of its being, drawing it back to its primitive state and alerting it to its true nature.

It *gravitates*, if I may put it that way, toward the realms of light. No beaver, no swallow, no bee wants to know more than their predecessors. All beings are at peace in the place they occupy. All are degraded, but they are unaware of it; only man has the feeling, and this feeling is at once the proof of his grandeur and his misery, of his sublime rights and his incredible degradation. In the state to which he is reduced, he does not even have the sad happiness of being unaware of himself: he must constantly contemplate himself, and he cannot contemplate himself without blushing; his very grandeur humiliates him, since the lights that elevate him to the level of an angel only serve to reveal within him abominable inclinations that degrade him to the level of a brute. He searches the depths of his being for some healthy part but cannot find it: evil has tainted everything, *and the whole man is nothing but a disease*. An inconceivable assemblage of two different and incompatible powers, a monstrous centaur, he feels that he is the result of some unknown crime, some detestable mixture that has corrupted man to his very core. All intelligence is by its very nature the result, both threefold and unique, of a *perception* that apprehends, a *reason* that affirms, and a *will* that acts. The first two powers are merely weakened in man; but the third *is broken ,* and like Tasso's serpent, *it drags itself along*, ashamed of its painful impotence. It is in this third power that man feels mortally wounded. He does not know what he wants; he wants what he does not want; he does not want what he wants; he *would like to want*. He sees in himself something that is not and that is stronger than he is. The wise man resists and cries out: *Who will deliver me? The* fool obeys, and he calls his cowardice *happiness*; but he cannot rid himself of this other will, incorruptible in its essence, although it has lost its dominion, and remorse, piercing his heart, never ceases to cry out to him: *By doing what you do not want, you consent to the law.* Who could believe that such a being could have emerged in this state from the hands of the Creator? This idea is so revolting that only philosophy—I mean pagan philosophy—has discerned original sin. Did not old Timaeus of Locri already say, surely following his master Pythagoras, *that our vices come far less from ourselves than from our fathers and the elements that constitute us*? Doesn't Plato similarly say *that we must attack the generator* rather than the *generated?* And elsewhere, did he not add that *the Lord, God of gods, seeing that beings subject to generation had lost* (or destroyed within themselves) *the inestimable gift, had determined to subject them to a treatment suited both to punish and to regenerate them*? Cicero did not stray from the sentiment of those philosophers and initiates who had thought *that we were in this world to expiate some crime committed in another*. He even quoted and adopted somewhere Aristotle's comparison, to whom the contemplation of human nature reminded the appalling torment of an unfortunate soul bound to a corpse and condemned to rot with it. Elsewhere, he explicitly states *that nature has treated us as a stepmother rather than a mother; and that the divine spirit within us is as if stifled by the inclination she has given us for all vices;* And is it not a singular thing that Ovid should have spoken of man precisely in the terms of Saint Paul? The erotic poet said: *I see the good, I love it, and evil seduces me; and the apostle, so elegantly translated by* Racine, said:

> I am not doing the good I love.
>
> And I do the evil I hate.

Moreover, when the philosophers I have just quoted assure us that the vices of human nature belong more *to fathers than to children*, it is clear that they are not speaking of any particular generation. If the proposition remains vague, it loses all meaning; so that the very nature of things relates it to an original, and consequently universal, corruption. Plato tells us *that, contemplating himself, he does not know whether he sees a monster more twofold, more evil than Typhon, or rather a moral being, gentle and benevolent, who partakes of the divine nature*. He adds that man, thus torn in opposite directions, cannot do good and live happily *without subjugating that power of the soul where evil resides, and without setting free that* which is the abode *and organ of virtue*. This is precisely the Christian doctrine, and one could not confess original sin more clearly. What do words matter? Man is evil, horribly evil. Did God create him that way? No, undoubtedly not, and Plato himself hastens to reply *that a good being neither wishes nor harms anyone*. So we are degraded, and how so? This corruption that Plato saw in

himself was apparently not something unique to him, and surely he did not consider himself any worse than his fellow men. He was essentially saying, like David: " *My mother conceived me in iniquity"*; and if these expressions had occurred to him, he could have adopted them without difficulty. Now, since all degradation can only be a punishment, and all punishment presupposes a crime, reason alone is led, as if by force, to original sin: for our fatal inclination to evil being a truth of feeling and experience proclaimed by all ages, and this inclination always more or less victorious over conscience and laws, never having ceased to produce transgressions of every kind on earth, man has never been able to recognize and deplore this sad state without thereby confessing the lamentable dogma of which I speak to you; for he cannot be *wicked* without being *evil*, nor evil without being degraded, nor degraded without being punished, nor punished without being guilty.

Finally, gentlemen, there is nothing so attested, nothing so universally believed in one form or another, nothing so intrinsically plausible as the theory of original sin.

Let me tell you this further: you will, I hope, find it easy to understand that an originally degraded intellect is and remains incapable (unless substantially regenerated) of that ineffable contemplation which our ancient masters so aptly called *beatific vision*, since it produces, and indeed is, eternal happiness; just as you will understand that a material eye, substantially corrupted, can be incapable, in that state, of bearing sunlight. Now, this inability to enjoy the Sun is, if I am not mistaken, the sole consequence of original sin that we are bound to regard as natural and independent of any actual transgression. Reason can, it seems to me, rise to this level; and I believe it has the right to applaud itself for it without ceasing to be obedient.

Having studied the man in himself, let us now turn to his history.

All humankind originated from a couple. This truth has been denied, like all others: hey! what does it matter?

We know very little about the times preceding the Flood, and indeed, according to some plausible conjectures, it would not be wise for us to know more. Only one consideration matters to us, and it must never be forgotten: that punishments are always proportionate to crimes, and crimes always proportionate to the knowledge of the guilty party. Thus, the Flood presupposes unheard-of crimes, and these crimes presuppose knowledge infinitely beyond our own. This is what is certain, and this is what must be explored further. This knowledge, freed from the evil that had rendered it so pernicious, survived the destruction of humankind within the righteous family. We are blinded to the nature and progress of science by a crude sophism that has captivated everyone: judging the time when people saw effects in causes by the time when they are laboriously climbing from effects to causes, when they concern themselves only with effects, when they say it is useless to concern themselves with causes, when they don't even know what a cause is. We constantly repeat: " *Just imagine how long it took to discover this or that!"* What inconceivable blindness! It took only an instant. If humankind could know the cause of a single physical phenomenon, it would probably understand all the others. We refuse to see that the truths most difficult to discover are very easy to understand. The solution to the problem of the *crown* once thrilled the most profound geometer of antiquity; But this same solution is found in all elementary mathematics courses, and is not beyond the ordinary capabilities of a fifteen-year-old's intellect. Plato, speaking somewhere of what is most important for man to know, immediately adds, with that penetrating simplicity which is natural to him: *These things are easily and perfectly learned*, IF SOMEONE TEACHES THEM TO US. That's the key. Moreover, it's evident for the simple reason that the first humans who repopulated the world after the great catastrophe needed extraordinary help to overcome the difficulties of every kind that confronted them; and look, gentlemen, at the beautiful nature of truth! Is it a question of establishing it? Witnesses come forward from all sides and present themselves: they never spoke to one another, they never contradict each other, while the witnesses of error contradict each other, even when they lie. Listen to the wise ancients on the account of the first humans: they will tell you that they were marvelous beings, and that beings of a higher order deigned to bestow upon them the most precious communications. On this point there is no dissonance: initiates, philosophers, poets, history, fable, Asia, and Europe all speak with one voice. Such a harmony of reason, revelation, and all human traditions forms a demonstration that words alone can contradict. Therefore, not only did humankind begin with science, but with a science different from our own, and superior to ours; because it began at a higher level, which made it even more dangerous; and this explains why science in its origins was always mysterious and confined to temples, where it finally died out when that flame could serve no other purpose than to burn. No one knows to what era—I do not mean the first outlines of society, but the great institutions, profound knowledge, and the most magnificent monuments of human industry and power—date back. Beside the Temple of St. Peter in Rome, I find the sewers of Tarquin and the Cyclopean constructions. This era

borders on that of the Etruscans, whose arts and power would be lost to antiquity. Hesiod called them *great and illustrious*, nine centuries before Christ, and they sent colonies to Greece and many islands several centuries before the Trojan War. Pythagoras, traveling in Egypt six centuries before our era, learned there the cause of all the phenomena of Venus. He even had the opportunity to learn something far more curious, since it had been known since antiquity *that Mercury, to extricate a goddess from the greatest predicament, played chess with the moon and won the seventy-second game on the* 15th day. I confess that, while reading *the Banquet of the Seven Sages* in Plutarch's moral works, I couldn't help but suspect that the Egyptians knew the true shape of the planetary orbits. You can, whenever you like, indulge yourself in checking this text. Julien, in one of his insipid speeches (I forget which one), calls the sun *the god with seven rays.* Where had he acquired this singular epithet? Surely it could only have come from the ancient Asian traditions he had gathered in his theurgic studies; and the sacred books of the Indians offer a good commentary on this text, since it is written there that seven young virgins, having gathered to celebrate the coming of *Krishna*, who is the Indian Apollo, were suddenly appeared among them by the god, who invited them to dance; but when these virgins excused themselves on the grounds that they lacked dancers, the god provided for them by dividing himself, so that each girl would have her own *Krishna*. Add to this that the true system of the world was perfectly known in the most ancient times. Consider that the pyramids of Egypt, rigorously oriented, predate all the established periods of history; that the arts are brothers who can only live and shine together; that the nation which could create colors capable of withstanding the free action of the air for thirty centuries, lift to a height of six hundred feet masses that would defy all our machinery, sculpt in granite birds whose every species a modern traveler could recognize; but that this nation, I say, was *necessarily* just as eminent in the other arts, and even *necessarily* knew a host of things that we do not. If from there I cast my eyes upon Asia, I see the walls of Nimrod erected on land still damp with the waters of the flood, and astronomical observations as ancient as the city itself. Where then shall we place these supposed times of barbarism and ignorance? Jolly philosophers have told us: *We do not lack centuries*: you lack them very much; for the time of the flood is there to stifle all the novels of the imagination; And the geological observations that demonstrate the fact also demonstrate its date, with a limited uncertainty, as insignificant in time as that which remains concerning the distance from the Moon to us can be in space. Lucretius himself could not help but bear striking witness to the novelty of the human family; and physics, which could here dispense with history, nevertheless draws new strength from it, since we see that historical certainty ends for all nations at the same time, that is to say, around the 8th century BC. Allow people who believe everything except the Bible to cite to us the Chinese observations made four or five thousand years ago, on a land that did not yet exist, by a people whom the Jesuits taught to make almanacs at the end of the 16th century. century; all this no longer deserves discussion: let them talk. I only want to present an observation that perhaps you have not made: that is that the whole system of Indian antiquities having been overturned from top to bottom by the useful work of the Calcutta Academy, and the simple inspection of a geographical map demonstrating that China could not have been populated until after India, the same blow that struck Indian antiquities brought down those of China, about which Voltaire especially has not ceased to deafen us.

Asia, moreover, having been the stage for the greatest wonders, it is not surprising that its peoples have retained a penchant for the marvelous stronger than that which is natural to humankind in general, and which everyone can recognize in themselves. Hence it is that they have always shown so little taste and talent for our sciences of *deduction*. It seems as if they still remember primitive science and the age of *intuition*. Does the chained eagle ask for a *hot air balloon* to rise into the air? No, it only asks that its chains be broken. And who knows if these peoples are not destined to contemplate spectacles that will be denied to the quibbling genius of Europe? In any case, observe, I beg you, that it is impossible to think of modern science without seeing it constantly surrounded by all the machines of the mind and all the methods of art. Beneath the narrow garb of the North, her head lost in the swirls of deceptive hair, her arms laden with books and instruments of every kind, pale from sleepless nights and labors, she drags herself, stained with ink and panting, along the road of truth, always bowing her brow, furrowed with algebra, toward the earth. Nothing like it existed in antiquity. As far as we can perceive the science of primitive times from such an enormous distance, we always see it free and isolated, flying more than walking, and presenting in its entire person something ethereal and supernatural. She gives free rein to the winds hair that escapes from an oriental *mitre*; the *ephod* covers her breast, heaved by inspiration; she looks only to the heavens; and her disdainful foot seems to touch the earth only to leave it. However, although she never asked anything of anyone and was not known to have any human support, it is no less proven that she possessed the rarest knowledge: this is a great proof, if you think about it, that ancient science had been spared the work imposed on ours, and that all the calculations we make on modern experience are the most false things imaginable.

THE KNIGHT

You have just proven to us, my good friend, that we readily speak of what we love. You promised me a concise symbol, but your profession of faith has become a kind of dissertation. The good thing is that you haven't said a word about the savages who brought it about.

THE COUNT

I confess that on this point I am like Job, *full of words*. I gladly expound them before you; but if only I could, at the cost of my life, be understood by all men and make them believe me! Besides, I don't know why you remind me of savages. It seems to me that I haven't ceased speaking to you about them for a moment. If all men descend from the three pairs that repopulated the universe, and if humankind began with science, then the savage can no longer be, as I told you, anything more than a branch detached from the social tree. I could even leave you with science, though it is quite undeniable, and reserve for myself only Religion, which alone suffices, even in a very imperfect form, to exclude the state of savagery. Wherever you see an altar, there you will find civilization. *The poor man in his hut, where the thatch covers him*, is less learned than we are, no doubt, but more truly social, if he attends catechism and benefits from it. The most shameful errors, the most detestable cruelties have stained the annals of Memphis, Athens, and Rome; but all virtues combined honored the huts of Paraguay. Now, if the religion of Noah's family had to be necessarily the most enlightened and the most real that one could possibly imagine, and if it is in its very reality that we must seek the causes of its corruption, this is a second demonstration added to the first, which could have done without it. We must therefore recognize that the state of civilization and science, in a certain sense, is the natural and primitive state of man. Thus, all Eastern traditions begin with a state of perfection and enlightenment, I would even say of *supernatural enlightenment*; And Greece, that lying Greece, *which has dared everything in history*, paid homage to this truth by placing its Golden Age at the origin of things. It is no less remarkable that it does not attribute a savage state to subsequent ages, not even the Iron Age; so that everything it has told us about these first men living in the woods, feeding on acorns, and then passing into a social state, contradicts itself. We can only refer to particular cases, that is to say, to a few degraded tribes who then painfully returned *to the state of nature*, which is civilization. Voltaire, which says it all, did he not admit that the motto of all nations has always been: THE GOLDEN AGE WAS THE FIRST TO APPEAR ON EARTH? Well, all nations have therefore protested in unison against the hypothesis of a primitive state of barbarism, and surely that is something that this protest is.

Now, what does it matter to me when this or that branch was severed from the tree? It happened, that's enough for me: no doubt about the degradation, and I dare say, no doubt about the cause of the degradation, which can only be a crime. A leader of a people, having corrupted the moral principle within himself through some of those transgressions which, according to appearances, are no longer possible in the current state of affairs, because fortunately we no longer know enough to become guilty to that extent; this leader of a people, I say, passed the anathema on to his descendants; and since all constant force is by its nature accelerating, since it continually adds to itself, this degradation, weighing without interruption on the descendants, has finally made them what we call *savages*. This is the ultimate degree of brutalization that Rousseau and his ilk call the *state of nature*. Two extremely different causes have cast a deceptive shadow over the appalling state of the savages: one is ancient, the other belongs to our century. Firstly, the immense charity of the Catholic priesthood has often, in speaking to us of these men, substituted its desires for reality. There was all too much truth in that initial impulse of Europeans who, in the age of Columbus, refused to recognize their fellow human beings in the degraded men who populated the New World. The priests used all their influence to contradict this opinion, which too readily favored the barbaric despotism of the new masters. They cried out to the Spaniards: “No violence! The Gospel condemns it. If you do not know how to overthrow the idols in the hearts of these unfortunate people, what good is it to overthrow their sad altars? To make them know and love God, you need a different tactic and different weapons than yours.” From the heart of the deserts, watered by their sweat and blood, they flew to Madrid and Rome to demand edicts and papal bulls against the ruthless greed that sought to enslave the Indians. The merciful priest extolled them to make them precious; he mitigated the evil, he exaggerated the good, he promised everything he desired; finally, Robertson, who is beyond reproach, warns us in his history of America *that we must be wary of all writers who belonged to the clergy on this subject, since they are generally too favorable to the natives.* Another source of the

false judgments made about them lies in the philosophy of our century, which has used savages to bolster its vain and culpable declamations against the social order; but the slightest attention is enough to warn us against the errors of charity and those of bad faith. One cannot fix one's gaze for a moment upon the savage without reading the anathema written, I do not say only in his soul, but even on the outward form of his body. He is a deformed child, robust and ferocious, in whom the flame of intelligence casts only a pale and intermittent glimmer. A formidable hand, heavy upon these devoted races, erases from them the two distinctive characteristics of our greatness: foresight and perfectibility. The savage cuts down the tree to gather the fruit; he unharnesses the ox that the missionaries have just entrusted to him, and cooks it with the wood of the plow. For more than three centuries he has gazed upon us without wanting to receive anything from us, except gunpowder to kill his fellow men, and brandy to kill himself; yet he has never even conceived of manufacturing these things: he relies on our avarice, which will never fail him. Just as the most abject and revolting substances are still susceptible to a certain degeneration, so too are the natural vices of humanity still corrupted in the savage. He is a thief, he is cruel, he is dissolute, but he is so in a different way than we are. To be criminals, we overcome our nature: the savage follows it, he has the appetite for crime, but not the remorse. While the son kills his father to spare him the troubles of old age, his wife destroys in her womb the fruit of her brutal love to escape the toils of breastfeeding. He tears out the bloody hair of his living enemy; He tears him apart, roasts him, and devours him while singing; if he comes across our strong liquors, he drinks to the point of drunkenness, fever, and death, equally devoid of the reason that commands man through fear, and of the instinct that repels animals through disgust. He is visibly depraved; he is struck at the very core of his moral essence; he makes the observer who knows how to see tremble: but do we want to tremble for ourselves, and in a truly salutary way? Let us consider that, with our intelligence, our morality, our sciences, and our arts, we are precisely to primitive man what the savage is to us. I cannot leave this subject without suggesting one more important observation: the barbarian, who is a kind of proportional average between civilized man and the savage, could and still can be civilized by any religion; but the savage, properly speaking, has never been civilized except by Christianity. It is a first-rate prodigy, a kind of redemption, exclusively reserved for the true priesthood. Eh! How could a criminal condemned to civil death regain his rights without a letter of pardon from the sovereign? And what letters of this kind are not countersigned? The more you reflect on it, the more convinced you will be that there is no way to explain this great phenomenon of savage peoples, which true philosophers have not sufficiently studied.

Furthermore, one must not confuse the *savage* with the *barbarian*. In the former, the germ of life is extinguished or dormant; in the latter, it has been fertilized and needs only time and circumstances to develop. From this moment, the language, which had degenerated with humankind, is reborn with them, perfected, and enriched. If one wishes to call this a *new language*, I agree: the expression is apt in a sense; but this sense is quite different from that adopted by modern sophists when they speak of *new* or *invented* languages.

No language could have been invented, neither by a man who could not command obedience, nor by several who could not understand one another. The best that can be said about speech is what has been said of that which is called WORD. *It sprang forth before all time from the bosom of its principle; it is as ancient as eternity... Who can recount its origin?* Already, despite the sad prejudices of the age, a physicist—yes, indeed, a physicist!—has taken it upon himself to concede, with a timid intrepidity, *that man spoke first because* he *was spoken to*. God bless the particle *"one*," so useful in difficult situations. While giving this initial effort all the credit it deserves, it must nevertheless be admitted that all those philosophers of the last century, without exception even to the best of them, are cowards who fear spirits.

Rousseau, in one of his sonorous rhapsodies, also shows some inclination to speak rationally. He confesses that languages seem to him quite a beautiful thing. Speech, *that hand of the mind*, as Charron calls it, strikes him with a certain admiration; and, all things considered, he doesn't quite understand how it was invented. But the great Condillac pities this modesty. He is astonished *that a man of wit like* Monsieur *Rousseau* should have sought difficulties where none exist, that he should not have seen that languages were formed imperceptibly, and that each person contributed to them. Therein lies the whole mystery, gentlemen: one generation said BA, and the other, BE; the Assyrians invented the nominative case, and the Medes, the genitive.

... Quis inepti

Tam patiens capitis, tam ferreus ut teneat se.

But before concluding on this subject, I would like to draw your attention to an observation that has always struck me. Why is it that we find in the primitive languages of all ancient peoples words that necessarily presuppose knowledge foreign to those peoples? Where did the Greeks, for example, at least three thousand years ago, get the epithet *Physizoos* (life-giving or life-possessing) that Homer sometimes gives to the earth? And that of *Pheresbios*, almost synonymous, which Hesiod attributes to it? Where did they get the even more singular epithet *Philemate* (loving or thirsting for blood) given to this same earth in a tragedy ? Who taught them to name sulfur, which is the symbol of fire, *the divine*? I am no less struck by the name *Cosmos*, given to the world. The Greeks called it beauty, because *all order is beauty*, as good Eustace says somewhere, and the supreme order is in the world. The Latins encountered the same idea and expressed it with their word **Mundus**, which we have adopted, simply giving it a French ending, except that one of these words excludes disorder, and the other excludes defilement; yet it is the same idea, and both words are equally true and equally false. But tell me further, I beg you, how did these ancient Latins, when they knew only war and plowing, conceive of expressing the idea of prayer and that of torture with the same word? Who taught them to call fever *the *purifying one* *, or *the *expiatory one* *? Wouldn't one say that there is a judgment here, a true understanding of the facts, by virtue of which a people affirms the correctness of the name? But do you believe that such judgments could have belonged to a time when people barely knew how to write, when the dictator tilled his garden, when they wrote verses that Varro and Cicero no longer understood? These words, and many others that could be cited, which pertain to all of Eastern metaphysics, are clear remnants of older languages, destroyed or forgotten. The Greeks had preserved some obscure traditions in this regard; and who knows if Homer did not attest to the same truth, perhaps unknowingly, when he speaks to us of certain men and things *that the gods call by one name and men by another*?

In reading modern metaphysicians, you will have encountered endless arguments about the importance of signs and the advantages of a philosophical language (as they call it) supposedly created *a priori* or perfected by philosophers. I do not wish to delve into the question of the origin of language (the same, incidentally, as that of innate ideas); what I can assure you, for nothing is clearer, is the prodigious talent of young peoples for forming words, and the absolute incapacity of philosophers for the same purpose. In the most refined centuries, I recall Plato observing this talent of peoples in their infancy. What is remarkable is that it seems as if they proceeded by deliberation, according to a system agreed upon by all, although this is rigorously impossible in every respect. Each language has its own genius, and this genius is ONE, so that it excludes any idea of composition, arbitrary formation, or prior convention. The general laws that constitute it are the most striking feature of all languages: in Greek, for example, one such law is that words can be joined by a kind of partial fusion that unites them to create a second meaning, without rendering them unrecognizable: this is a general rule from which the language never deviates. Latin, more resistant, allows its words, so to speak, *to be broken*; and from their fragments, chosen and joined by some entirely singular *agglutination*, are born new words of surprising beauty, whose elements can only be recognized by a trained eye. From these three words, for example, CA *ro*, DA *ta*, VER *mibus*, they made CADAVER, flesh abandoned to worms. From these other words, MA *gis*, and VO *lo*, NON and *vo* LO, they made MALO and NOLO, two excellent verbs that all languages, and Greek itself, can envy in Latin. From CÆ *cus* UT IRE (*to walk* or *grope like a blind man*) they made their CÆCUTIRE, another very felicitous verb that we lack. MA *gis* and *au* CTE produced MACTE, a word quite peculiar to the Latins, and which they use with great elegance. The same system produced their word UTERQUE, so happily formed from U *nus al* TERQUE, a word that I envy them extremely; for we can only express it in a single phrase, *both of us*. And what shall I tell you of the word NEGOTIOR, admirably formed from N *e* EGO OTIOR (*I am busy, I am not wasting my time*), from which we got *negotium*, etc.? But it seems to me that Latin genius surpassed itself in the word ORATIO, formed from OS and RATIO, *mouth* and *reason*, that is to say, *spoken reason*.

The French are not entirely unfamiliar with this system. Our ancestors, for example, were quite adept at naming their own words by partially combining the word ANcien (*ancient*) with ÊTRE (to be), as they made *belfry* from B *el* EFFROI (belfry). See how they once worked with the two Latin words DU *and* IRE, from which they derived DUIRE, *to go together*, and by a very natural extension, *mener* (to lead), *to drive*. From the personal pronoun SE, the relative adverb of place HORS (outside), and the verbal ending TIR (to pull), they made SORTIR (to go out), that is to say, SEHORSTIR, *or to put oneself out of the place where it was*, which seems marvelous to me. Are you curious to know how they combined words in the manner of the Greeks? I will cite for you the word COURAGE (courage), formed from COR (heart) and RAGE, that is to say, *rage of the heart*; Or, to put it better, *exaltation*,

enthusiasm of the heart (in the English sense of RAGE). This word was, in its origin, a very felicitous translation of the Greek *thymos*, which no longer has a synonym in French. Let me dissect the word INCONTESTABLE, and you will find the negation IN, the sign of mean and simultaneity CUM, the ancient root TEST, common, if I am not mistaken, to the Latins and the Celts, and the sign of capacity ABLE, from the Latin HABILIS, unless both derive from a common and earlier root. Thus, the word *indisputable* means precisely *something so clear that it admits no contrary proof*.

Admire, I beg you, the subtle metaphysics that, from the Latin QUARE, *meaning "to twist*," gave us our CAR, and that was able to derive from UN *us* the particle ON, which plays such a significant role in our language. I cannot help but mention our word RIEN (nothing), which the French formed from the Latin REM, taken to mean either a thing at all or absolute being. This is why, except in cases where RIEN, in response to a question, contains or implies an ellipsis, we can only use this word with a negation, because it is not negative, unlike the Latin NIHIL, which is formed from NE and HIL *um*, just as NEMO is formed from NE and *ho* MO (not an atom, not a man).

It is a pleasure to witness, so to speak, the work of this hidden principle that forms languages. Sometimes you will see it struggle against a difficulty that stops its progress; it seeks a form that it lacks: its materials resist it; then it will extricate itself from the predicament through a felicitous solecism, and it will say quite correctly: *Busy street, flashy color, market square, brittle metal*, etc. At other times you will see it obviously err, and make a formal blunder, as in the French word **incrédule* *, which denies a defect instead of denying a virtue. Sometimes it will become possible to recognize at the same time the error and the cause of the error: the French ear having, for example, inappropriately demanded that the letter *s* not be pronounced in the monosyllable EST, third person singular of the substantive verb, it became indispensable, to avoid ridiculous ambiguities, to remove the conjunctive particle ET from the general law which orders the liaison of any final consonant with the following vowel: but nothing was more unfortunately established; for this conjunction, already unique, and consequently insufficient, by thus refusing, *iratis musis*, to ally itself with the following vowels, has become excessively embarrassing for the poet, and even for the prose writer who has an ear.

But, to return to the fundamental talent (it is to you in particular that I address myself, Senator): contemplate your nation, and ask it with what words it has enriched its language since the great era? Alas! This nation has done as all others have. Since it began to reason, it has borrowed words and created no more. No people can escape the general law. Everywhere, the age of civilization and philosophy is of this kind, that of sterility. I read on your visiting slips: *Minister, General, Kammerherr, Kammeriunker, Fraülein, General* -ANCHEF, *General* DEJOURNEL, *Joustizii-Politzii Minister*, etc., etc. Commerce makes me read on its posters: *magazei, fabrica, meuble*, etc., etc. I expect in practice: *direetii na prova, na leva; Deployment in a checkerboard pattern, in echelon, countermarch*, etc. The military administration pronounces: *Hauptwacht, Exercis-Hause, Ordnance-Hause; Commissariat, Cazarna, Canzellarii,* etc.; but all these words and a thousand others I could cite are not worth a single one of those beautiful, elegant, expressive words that abound in your primitive language, *Souproug* (husband), for example, which means exactly *one who is bound with another under the same yoke*: nothing could be more fitting or more ingenious. Truly, gentlemen, it must be admitted that the savages or barbarians who *deliberated* long ago to form such names were not at all lacking in tact.

And what shall we say of the surprising analogies one observes between languages separated by time and space, to the point of never having been able to touch? I could show you, in one of those handwritten volumes you see on my table, several pages covered in my own handwriting, which I have titled " *Parallels between the Greek and French Languages*." I know that I was preceded in this by a great master, *Henri Estienne*; but I have never come across his book, and nothing is more amusing than compiling these kinds of collections oneself, as one reads and examples present themselves. Please note that I am not referring to mere similarities of words acquired simply through contact and communication: I am speaking only of similarities of ideas proven by synonyms of meaning, different in every way in form; which excludes any idea of borrowing. I will simply point out one rather peculiar thing: when it comes to rendering certain ideas whose natural expression would somehow offend delicacy, the French have often encountered precisely the same turns of phrase once used by the Greeks to salvage these jarring naiveties; which must seem quite extraordinary, since in this respect we acted of our own volition, without consulting our intermediaries, the Latins. These examples suffice to point us toward the force that governs the formation of languages, and to demonstrate the futility of all modern speculation. Each language, taken individually, repeats the spiritual phenomena that occurred at its origin; and the older the language, the more

perceptible these phenomena are. You will find absolutely no exception to the observation I have so insisted upon: that as one ascends toward those times of ignorance and barbarity that witnessed the birth of languages, you will find ever greater logic and depth in the formation of words, and that this talent disappears in a contrary gradation as one descends toward the ages of civilization and science. A thousand years before our era, Homer expressed in a single, clear, and harmonious word: *They responded with a favorable acclamation to what they had just heard*. In reading this poet, one sometimes hears the generative fire that gives life its life crackling around oneself, and at other times one feels moistened by the dew that distills from his enchanting verses onto the poetic bed of the immortals. He knows how *to spread* the divine voice around the human ear, like a sonic atmosphere that still resonates after the God has ceased to speak. He can evoke Andromache, and show her to us as her husband saw her the last time, trembling with tenderness and LAUGHING THROUGH TEARS.

Where, then, did this language come from, a language that seems to spring forth like Minerva, and whose first creation is a despairing masterpiece, without it ever being possible to prove that it stammered? We will exclaim naively, following the modern scholars: *How many centuries it took to form such a language!* Indeed, many, if it was formed as we imagine. From the oath of Louis the German in 842 to Corneille's *Le *Menteur *, and to Pascal's *Les Menteuses *, eight centuries elapsed: following a rule of proportion, two thousand years is not too much to form the Greek language. But Homer lived in a barbaric age; and if one wishes to rise above one's own time, one finds oneself amidst wandering Pelasgians and the first rudiments of society. Where, then, will we place those centuries we needed to form this marvelous language? If, on this point concerning the origin of language, as on a multitude of others, our century has missed the truth, it is because it had a mortal fear of encountering it. Languages *began*; but *speech* never did, not even with humankind. One necessarily preceded the other; for *speech* is only possible through the WORD. Every particular language is born, like an animal, through explosion and development, without humankind ever having passed from a state of *aphonia* to the use of speech. Humankind has always spoken, and it is with sublime reason that the Hebrews called it the SPEAKING SOUL. When a new language is formed, it is born in the midst of a society that is in full possession of language; and the action, or the principle that presides over this formation, cannot arbitrarily invent any word; it uses those it finds around it or that it calls forth from further afield; *it feeds on them*, it manipulates them, it digests them. He never adopts them without modifying them to some extent. Much has been said about arbitrary signs in a century that was captivated by any crude expression that excluded order and intelligence; but there are no arbitrary signs, every word has its reason. You lived for a time, Monsieur le Chevalier, in a beautiful country at the foot of the Alps, and, if I am not mistaken, you even killed a few men there...

THE KNIGHT

On my honor, I have not killed anyone. At most, I could say, like the young man in Madame ^{de} Sévigné's story: *I did not harm him*.

THE COUNT

In any case, you may recall that in this country the *sound* (furfur) is called *Bren*. On the other side of the Alps, an owl is called *Sava*. If you had been asked why the two peoples chose these two arrangements of sounds to express the two ideas, you would have been tempted to answer: *Because they thought it appropriate; such things are arbitrary*. You would, however, have been mistaken: for the first of these two words is English, and the second is Slavic, and from Ragusa to Kamchatka, it is capable of signifying in the beautiful Russian language what it signifies eight hundred leagues from here in a purely local dialect. You are not tempted, I hope, to maintain that men, deliberating on the Thames, on the Rhône, on the Oby, or on the Po, happened to encounter the same sounds to express the same ideas. The two words therefore pre-existed in the two languages that gave them to the two dialects. Do you believe that the four peoples received them from an earlier people? I don't believe it, but I admit it: it follows first that the two immense Teutonic and Slavic families did not arbitrarily invent these two words, but that they had received them. Then the question begins again with regard to these earlier nations: where did they get them from? The answer must be the same: *they had received them*; and so on, going back to the origin of things. The candles that are being brought in now remind me of their name: the French used to have a large trade in wax with the city of *Botzia* in the kingdom of Fez; they brought back a large quantity of wax candles which they began to call *botsies*. The national genius soon shaped this word and made it *bougies (candles*). English has retained the

old word **wax-candle** *, and German prefers * *wachslicht** (wax light); but everywhere you see the reason that determined the word. If I hadn't encountered the etymology of **bougie** (candle) in the preface to Thomassin's *Hebrew Dictionary*, where I certainly wasn't looking for it, would I have been any less certain of any etymology whatsoever? To doubt in this regard, one must have abandoned reasoning. Observe, if you please, that this very word, * *etymology*,* is already a great proof of antiquity's prodigious talent for finding or adopting the most perfect words: for this presupposes that every word is *true.* That is to say, it is not arbitrarily conceived; which is enough to guide a sound mind far. What we know in this area proves much, because of the inferences that follow from it for other cases; what we don't know, on the contrary, proves nothing, except the ignorance of the one who seeks. Never has an arbitrary sound expressed, nor could it express, an idea. As thought necessarily pre-exists words, which are only the physical signs of thought, words, in turn, pre-exist the explosion of any new language that receives them ready-made and then modifies them at will. The genius of each language moves like an animal to find on every side what suits it. In ours, for example, * *maison** (house) is Celtic, * *palace** is Latin, * *basilica* * is Greek, * *honnir** (to scorn) is Teutonic, * *rabot** (plane) is Slavic, * *almanach* (almanac)* is Arabic, and * *sopha* (sofa)* is Hebrew. Where did all this come from? It matters little to me, at least for the moment: it suffices for me to prove to you that languages are not formed from other languages, which they ordinarily kill to nourish themselves, like carnivorous animals. Let us therefore never speak of *chance* or arbitrary signs, *Gallis hcec Philodemus ait*. We are already well advanced in this field when we have sufficiently reflected on this first observation I made to you; namely, that the formation of the most perfect, the most meaningful, the most philosophical words, in the fullest sense of the term, invariably belongs to times of ignorance and simplicity. It must be added, to complete this grand theory, that the talent *for naming* likewise invariably disappears as one descends toward the ages of civilization and science. In all the writings of the time on this interesting subject, there is a constant desire for *a philosophical language*, but without knowing and without even suspecting that the most philosophical language is the one in which philosophy has played the least part. Philosophy lacks two small things to create words: the intelligence to invent them, and the power to make them adopted. Does it see a new object? It leafs through its dictionaries to find an ancient or foreign word; and almost always, it even fails. The word " *montgolfière"* (hot air balloon), for example, which is a national term, is *correct*, at least in one sense; and I prefer it to " *aérostat"* (aerostat), which is the scientific term and says nothing: it would be just as well to call a ship a " *hydrostat."*Look at this multitude of new words borrowed from Greek over the last twenty years, as crime or madness demanded them: almost all of them are taken or formed in the wrong sense. The word **theophilanthrope* *, for example, is more foolish than the thing itself, and that's saying a lot: an English or German schoolboy would have known how to say **theanthropophile* *. You'll tell me that this word was invented by wretches in a wretched time; but chemical nomenclature, which was certainly the work of very enlightened men, nevertheless begins with a low-class solecism, * *oxygen** instead of * *oxigone* *. Moreover, although I am not a chemist, I have excellent reasons to believe that this entire dictionary will be obsolete; but, considering it only from a philosophical and grammatical point of view, it would perhaps be the most unfortunate thing imaginable, if metrical nomenclature had not since come to challenge and forever win the palm of barbarity. The refined ear of the grand siècle would have rejected it with a painful shudder. At that time, genius alone had the right to persuade the French ear, and Corneille himself was rejected more than once; but, in our time, it has given itself to everyone.

When a language is created (as it can be), it is entrusted to great writers, who use it without even thinking about creating new words. Is there, in *Athalie* 's dream, in the description of hell found in *Telemachus*, or in the peroration of Condé's funeral oration, a single word that is not vulgar, taken out of context? If, however, the right to create new expressions belonged to anyone, it would be to great writers and not to philosophers, who are remarkably inept on this point: the former, however, use them only with extreme restraint, never in inspired pieces, and only for nouns and adjectives; as for *words*, they scarcely think of uttering new ones. Finally, we must rid ourselves of this idea of *new languages*, except only in the sense I have just explained; Or, if you wish me to use another expression, speech is eternal, and every language is as ancient as the people who speak it. It is objected, for lack of reflection, that there is no nation that can itself understand its ancient language: and what does it matter, I ask you? Does change that does not affect the principle preclude identity? Would he who saw me in my cradle recognize me today? I believe, however, that I have the right to call myself *the same*. It is no different with a language: it is the same as long as the people are the same. The poverty of languages in their beginnings is another assumption made *of full* philosophical power and authority. New words prove nothing, because as they acquire new ones, they let others slip away, in an unknown proportion. What is certain is that every people has spoken, and that they have spoken precisely as much as they thought, and as well as they thought; For it is equally foolish to

believe that there is a sign for a thought that does not exist, or that a thought lacks a sign to manifest itself. The Huron does not say * *garde-temps* *, for example; it is a word surely missing from their language. But * *Tomawak*,* fortunately, is missing from ours, and that word counts just as well as any other. It would be highly desirable for us to have a thorough knowledge of *savage* languages. The zeal and tireless work of missionaries had prepared an immense body of work on this subject, which would have been infinitely useful to philology and human history: the destructive fanaticism of the 18th century The century has made it disappear forever. If we had, I don't say monuments, since there cannot be any, but only dictionaries of these languages, I have no doubt that we would find there those words I was just speaking of, evident remnants of a former language spoken by an enlightened people. And even if we did not find them, it would only follow that the decay has reached the point of erasing these last vestiges: *Etiam periere ruinæ*. But in whatever state they find themselves, these *ruined* languages remain like terrible monuments to divine justice; and if we knew them thoroughly, we would probably be more frightened by the words they possess than by those they lack. Among the savages of New Holland, there is no word to express the idea of God; but there is one to express the operation which destroys a child in its mother's womb, in order to spare her the pains of breastfeeding: it is called the MI-BRA.

THE KNIGHT

You have greatly interested me, Count, in treating at some length a question that has crossed our path, but you often let slip words that cause me distraction, and for which I always promise myself I will ask you for an explanation. You said, for example, while moving on to another subject, *that the question of the origin of speech was the same as that of the origin of ideas*. I would be curious to hear you reason on this point; for I have often heard of various writings on the origin of ideas, and even read some; but the hectic life I have led for so long, and perhaps also the lack of a good *smoother* (this word, as you see, does not belong to the original language) have always prevented me from seeing things clearly. This problem presents itself to me only through a kind of cloud that I have never been able to dispel; and often I have been tempted to believe that bad faith and misunderstanding played a significant role here as elsewhere.

THE COUNT

Your suspicion is perfectly well-founded, my dear knight, and I dare to believe that I have reflected enough on this subject to be in a position to at least spare you some trouble.

But first and foremost, I would like to propose the deciding factor that must precede all others: it is that of authority. Human reason is manifestly convicted of its powerlessness to guide men; for few are capable of reasoning well, and no one is capable of reasoning well about everything; so that, in general, it is good, whatever one may say, to begin with authority. Weigh, then, the arguments on both sides, and consider, against the sensible origin of ideas, Pythagoras, Plato, Cicero, Origen, Saint Augustine, Descartes, Cudworth, Lami, Polignac, Pascal, Nicole, Bossuet, Fénelon, Leibniz, and that illustrious Malebranche, who may well have sometimes erred on the path of truth, but who never strayed from it. I will not name the champions of the other party; for their names are too much for me to bear. Even if I didn't know a word about the matter, I would decide based on nothing more than my taste for good company and my aversion to bad company.

I would offer you yet another preliminary argument, one that carries considerable weight: it is the one I draw from the detestable result of this absurd system which seeks, so to speak, to materialize the origin of our ideas. There is none, I believe, more degrading, more disastrous for the human mind. Through it, reason has lost its wings and drags itself along like a filthy reptile; through it, the divine source of poetry and eloquence has dried up; through it, all the moral sciences have perished.

THE KNIGHT

It may not be for me to argue about the consequences of the system; but as for its defenders, it seems to me, my dear friend, that it is possible to cite respectable names alongside those other names that tear at your mouth.

THE COUNT

Much less, I can assure you, than is commonly believed; and it must be observed first that a host of great men, created by the full authority of the last century, will soon cease to be so or to appear so. The great cabal needed their renown: it created it as one creates a box or a shoe; but this artificial reputation is on its last legs, and soon the appalling mediocrity of these *great men* will be the inexhaustible subject of European ridicule.

Moreover, we must exclude from *these respectable names* those truly illustrious philosophers whom the philosophical sect inappropriately enlisted among the defenders of the sensible origin of ideas. You may not have forgotten, Senator, the day we were reading together Cabanis's book, * *On the Relations of the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man**, at the point where he unceremoniously places Hippocrates and Aristotle among the defenders of the material system. I pointed out to you in this regard the twofold and invariable characteristic of modern philosophism: ignorance and audacity. How could people entirely unfamiliar with scholarly languages, and especially with Greek, of which they didn't understand a single line, presume to quote and judge the Greek philosophers? If Cabanis, in particular, had consulted a good edition of Hippocrates, instead of quoting on faith or reading some poor translation with utter carelessness, he would have seen that the work he cites as belonging to Hippocrates is a supposed fragment. This would be no further proof that the author's style, however bad a writer Hippocrates may be, is clear and elegant. Moreover, this writer, whoever he may be, spoke neither for nor against the question; this is what I pointed out to you at the time. He confines himself to addressing the issue of experience and theory in medicine, so that for him, *aesthesis* is synonymous with *experience*, and not with *sensation*. I also made you realize that Hippocrates should, with far greater justification, be ranked among the defenders of innate ideas, since he was Plato's teacher, from whom Plato borrowed his principal metaphysical dogmas.

With regard to Aristotle, although it was not possible for me to give you at once all the clarifications you might have desired, you were nevertheless kind enough to trust me when, on the sole faith of a memory which rarely deceives me, I quoted to you this fundamental maxim of the Greek philosopher, *that man can learn nothing except by virtue of what he already knows*; which alone necessarily presupposes something similar to the theory of innate ideas.

And if you examine what he wrote, with truly admirable strength of mind and finesse of expression, on the essence of the mind which he places in thought itself, you will not be left with the slightest doubt about the error which has sought to reduce this philosopher to Locke and Condillac.

As for the Scholastics, who have been far too harshly criticized these days, what has particularly misled the multitude of superficial men who have presumed to address a great question without understanding it is the famous axiom of the schoolboy: *Nothing can enter the mind except through the senses*. Through lack of intelligence or good faith, it has been believed or said that this famous axiom excludes innate ideas: which is quite false. I know, Senator, that you are not afraid of folios. I intend to have you read Saint Thomas Aquinas's doctrine on Forms one day; you will then understand how much...

THE KNIGHT

You are forcing me, my good friends, to make the acquaintance of some strange characters. I thought that Saint Thomas was sometimes mentioned in church; but I had little idea that he could be discussed among us.

THE COUNT

Saint Thomas, my dear knight, flourished in the 13th $^{\text{century}}$. He could not concern himself with sciences that did not exist in his time, and which were of no concern to anyone then. His style, admirable in terms of clarity, precision, force, and conciseness, could not, however, be that of Bembo, Muret, or Maffei. He was nonetheless one of the greatest minds that ever existed in the world. Even poetic genius was not foreign to him. The Church has preserved some sparks of it that have since inspired admiration and envy in Santeuil. Since you know Latin, Sir, I would not presume to suggest that, at the age of fifty and retired to your old manor, God willing, you might borrow Saint Thomas from your parish priest to judge for yourself this great man. But I return to the question. Since Saint Thomas was nicknamed the *angel of the School*, it is above all he whom we must cite to absolve the School; and until Monsieur le Chevalier turns fifty, it is to you, Senator, that I will make known Saint Thomas's doctrine on ideas. You will see first that he does not hesitate to declare *that the intellect, in our degraded state, understands nothing without an image*. But then listen to him speak on the mind and on ideas. He will carefully distinguish the

passive intellect, or that power which receives impressions from the *active intellect* (which he also calls *possible*), from the intellect proper, which reasons about impressions. The senses know only the individual; only the intellect rises to the universal. Your eyes perceive a triangle; but this apprehension, which you share with animals, constitutes you yourself only as a simple animal; and you will only become *a man*, or an intellect, by rising from the *triangle* to *triangulation*. It is this power of generalization that *specializes* man and makes him what he is; for the senses play no part in this operation, they receive impressions and transmit them to the intellect; but only the intellect can render them *intelligible*. The senses are foreign to any spiritual idea, and they are even ignorant of their own operation, since sight cannot see itself nor see that it sees.

I would also like to share with you the superb definition of truth given to us by Saint Thomas. *Truth*, he says, *is an equation between the affirmation and its object*. What accuracy and what depth! It is a flash of truth defining itself, and he was careful to warn us that it is only an *equation* between *what is said about the thing* and *what is in the thing*; "but that with regard to the spiritual operation which affirms, it admits no *equation*," because it is above all and resembles nothing, so that there can be no relation, no analogy, no *equation* between the thing understood and the operation which understands.

Now, whether universal ideas are innate in us, or whether we see them in God, or however you like, it doesn't matter; that's what I don't want to examine at this moment. The negative aspect of the question is undoubtedly its most important element. Let us first establish that the greatest, noblest, and most virtuous minds in the world have agreed to reject the sensible origin of ideas. This is the holiest, most unanimous, and most compelling protest of the human mind against the grossest and most vile of errors. As for the rest, we can postpone the question.

You see, gentlemen, I am in a position to reduce somewhat the number of those *respectable names* you mentioned, Monsieur le Chevalier. Moreover, I do not refuse to recognize some of them among the defenders of *sensibilism* (this word, or any other better one can be found, has become necessary); but tell me, has it never happened to you, either through misfortune or weakness, to find yourself in bad company? In that case, as you know, there is only one thing to say: GET OUT; while you're there, they have the right to make fun of you, to say nothing more.

After this brief preliminary, Sir, I would first like, if you would do me the honor of choosing me as your guide in this kind of philosophy, to point out that any discussion on the origin of ideas is utterly ridiculous until the question of the essence of the soul has been resolved. Would you be allowed in court to claim an inheritance as a relative while your parentage was still in doubt? Well, gentlemen, there are similar questions in philosophical discussions, questions that lawyers call *preliminary*, and which must be absolutely decided before any further discussion can proceed. If the esteemed Thomas is right in this beautiful verse:

> Man lives by his soul, and the soul is thought.

Everything has been said; for if thought is essence, to ask the origin of ideas is to ask the origin of origins. Here is Condillac telling us: " *I will concern myself with the human mind, not to understand its nature, which would be rash; but only to examine its operations*." Let us not be fooled by this hypocritical modesty: whenever you see a philosopher of the last century bow respectfully before some problem, telling us *that the question is beyond the capabilities of the human mind; that he will not undertake to solve it*, etc., be assured that he, on the contrary, fears the problem as too clear and that he is quick to pass by it in order to preserve the right to *muddy the waters*. I do not know one of these gentlemen to whom the sacred title of *honest man* perfectly applies. You see an example of this here: why lie? Why say that one does not wish to pronounce on the essence of the soul, while very explicitly pronouncing on the crucial point by maintaining that ideas come to us through the senses, which clearly excludes thought from the class of essences? Moreover, I do not see what is more difficult about the question of the essence of thought than that of its origin, which is approached so courageously. *Can one conceive of thought as an accident of a substance that does not think?* Or *can one conceive of the accident of thought as knowing itself, as thinking and meditating on the essence of its subject, which does not think?* This is the problem presented in two different forms, and for my part, I confess that I see nothing hopeless in it. But ultimately, one is perfectly free to pass over it in silence, provided that one acknowledges, and even warns, at the beginning of any work on the origin of ideas, that it is presented as nothing more than a mere intellectual exercise, a completely far-fetched hypothesis, since the

question cannot be seriously considered until the preceding one is resolved. However, such a declaration in the preface would hardly lend credibility to the book; and anyone familiar with this type of writer would scarcely expect such a display of integrity.

I would then point out to you, Sir, a significant ambiguity found in the very title of all books written in the *modern* sense, on the origin of ideas, since this word " *origin"* can designate either the merely occasional and excitatory cause, or the productive cause of ideas. In the first case, there is no longer any dispute, since ideas are assumed to pre-exist; in the second, it is just as valid to maintain that the matter of the electric spark is produced by the exciter.

We would then investigate why we always speak of the origin of *ideas*, and never of the origin of *thoughts*. There must be some hidden reason for the constant preference given to one of these expressions over the other: this point would soon be clarified; then I would tell you, using the very words of Plato, whom I always gladly quote: *Do you and I understand the same thing by this word 'thought'?* For me, thought is THE DISCOURSE THAT THE MIND TELLS ITSELF.

And this sublime definition alone would demonstrate to you the truth of what I was telling you earlier: *that the question of the origin of ideas is the same as that of the origin of speech*; for thought and speech are but two magnificent synonyms; intelligence cannot think without knowing that it thinks, nor know that it thinks without speaking, since it must say: *I know*.

If someone initiated into modern doctrines comes to tell you that *you speak* because you have been spoken to; ask him (but will he understand you?) if understanding, in his opinion, is the same thing as hearing; and if he believes that, in order to *hear* speech, it is enough to hear the noise it sends into the ear?

Furthermore, leave this question aside, if you will. If we wish to delve deeper into the main issue, I would hasten to lead you to a crucial preliminary point: convincing you that, after so much debate, there is still no agreement on the definition of *innate ideas*. Could you believe that Locke never bothered to tell us what he meant by this word? Yet nothing could be truer. The French translator of Bacon, mocking *innate ideas*, declares that he confesses he doesn't *remember having had knowledge of the square of the hypotenuse in his mother's womb*. Here, then, is a man of wit (for Locke had many) who attributes to spiritualist philosophies the belief that a fetus, in its mother's womb, knows mathematics, or that we can know without learning; that is to say, in other words, learn without learning; and that this is what philosophers call *innate ideas*.

A very different writer, of a completely different authority, who today honors France with his superior talents and the noble use he makes of them, believed he was arguing decisively against *innate ideas* by asking: *How*, if God "had engraved such and such an idea in our minds, could *man* succeed in erasing them? How, for example, can the idolatrous child, born like the Christian with the *distinct notion* of a single God, nevertheless be reduced to the point of believing in a multitude of gods?"

How much I could tell you about this distinct *concept* and about the appalling power, which man all too truly possesses, *to more or less obliterate his innate ideas* and *transmit his degradation*! I will simply point out here an evident confusion between the *idea* or the simple *notion* and the affirmation, two things, however, that are entirely different: it is the former that is *innate, and not the latter; for, I believe, no one has ever thought of saying that there are innate* reasonings. The deist says: *There is only one God*, and he is right; the idolater says: *There are several*, and he is wrong; he is mistaken, but like a man who might err in a calculation. Would it follow by chance that the latter would not have the concept of number? On the contrary, it is proof that he does possess it; for, without this concept, he would not have the honor of being mistaken. Indeed, to err, one must make an assertion; something that cannot be done without some power of the verb " *to be*," which is the soul of every verb, and every assertion presupposes a pre-existing notion. Therefore, without the prior idea of God, there would be neither theists nor polytheists, especially since one cannot say *yes* or *no* about what one does not know, and it is impossible to be mistaken about God without having the idea of God. It is thus the *notion*, or the pure *idea*, that is innate and necessarily foreign to the senses: if it is subject to the law of development, it is the universal law of thought and life in all spheres of earthly creation. Moreover, every notion is true.

You see, gentlemen, that on this big question (and I could cite many other examples), we are still trying to figure out precisely *what it is about*.

One last preliminary point, no less essential, would be to draw your attention to this secret action, which, in all the sciences...

THE SENATOR

Believe me, my dear friend, do not play around with this question any longer; for your foot will slip, and we will be forced to spend the night here.

THE COUNT

God forbid, my good friends, for you would be quite poorly housed. I will, however, only pity you, my dear senator, and not at all that amiable soldier who would be quite comfortable on a sofa.

THE KNIGHT

You remind me of my bivouacs; but although you're not a soldier, you could also tell us about some terrible nights. Take heart, my dear friend! Some misfortunes can have a certain sweetness; I at least feel this way, and I like to think I share it with you.

THE COUNT

I find no difficulty in resigning myself; I will even confess that, if I were isolated, and if the blows that have struck me had wounded only me, I would regard everything that has happened in the world as a grand and magnificent spectacle that would leave me entirely in awe; but how dearly the entrance ticket has cost me!... However, I do not murmur against the adorable power that has so greatly diminished my space. See how it is already beginning to compensate me, since I am here, since it has so liberally given me friends such as you. Moreover, one must know how to step outside oneself and rise high enough to see the world, instead of seeing only a point. I never think without admiration of this political whirlwind that has come to tear from their seats thousands of men destined never to know one another, to make them whirl together like dust in the fields. There are three of us here, for example, who were born never to know each other: yet we are together, we converse; and, although our cradles were so far apart, perhaps our graves will touch.

While the mixing of people is remarkable, the communication of languages is no less so. I was browsing one day in the library of the Academy of Sciences in this city, reading Bayer's *Museum Sinicum*, a book which has become, I believe, quite rare, and which belongs more particularly to Russia, since the author, having settled in that capital, had his book printed there nearly eighty years ago. I was struck by a reflection from this learned and pious writer. "We do not yet see," he said, "the purpose of our work on languages; but soon we will. It is not without a great design of Providence that languages completely unknown in Europe two centuries ago have been made accessible to everyone today. We may already suspect this design; and it is our sacred duty to contribute to it with all our might." What would Bayer say if he were alive today? The workings of Providence would seem to him to have accelerated considerably. Let us first reflect on the *universal language.* Never has this title been more fitting for the French language; and what is strange is that its power seems to increase with its sterility. Its heyday is over: yet everyone understands it, everyone speaks it; and I do not even believe there is a city in Europe that does not contain some men capable of writing it perfectly. The just and honorable trust placed in England in the exiled French clergy has allowed the French language to take deep root there: it is perhaps a second conquest, which has gone unnoticed, for God does not, but which may have happier consequences than the first. Singular destiny of these two great peoples, who cannot cease to seek or hate each other! God has placed them facing each other like two prodigious magnets that attract each other on one side and repel each other on the other, for they are at once enemies and relatives. This same England has carried our languages to Asia, had Newton translated into the language of Muhammad, and young Englishmen defend theses in Calcutta in Arabic, Persian, and Bengali. For its part, France, which thirty years ago had no idea that there was more than one living language in Europe, has learned them all, while forcing other nations to learn its own. Add to this that the longest voyages have ceased to frighten the imagination; that all the great navigators are European; that the entire Orient is clearly yielding to European influence; that the Crescent, pressed at its two points, Constantinople and Delhi, is bound to burst in the

middle; that events have given England fifteen hundred leagues of borders with Tibet and China, and you will have some idea of what is brewing. Man, in his ignorance, often errs about ends and means, about his strength and resistance, about tools and obstacles. Sometimes he tries to cut down an oak with a penknife, and sometimes he throws a bomb to break a reed; but Providence never gropes, and it is not in vain that it stirs the world. Everything indicates that we are marching toward a great unity which we must *greet from afar*, to use a religious expression. We are painfully and quite justly crushed; but if wretched eyes such as mine are worthy to glimpse divine secrets, we are *crushed* only to be *mingled*.

THE SENATOR

O mihi tum longæ maneat pars ultima vitae!

THE KNIGHT

I hope you will allow the *soldier* to speak in French:

Run, fly, hours too slow,

Who are delaying this happy day?

END OF SECOND INTERVIEW

THIRD INTERVIEW

THE SENATOR

It is I, my dear Count, who will begin the conversation today by presenting you with a difficult question, Gospel in hand; this is serious, as you can see. When the disciples of the God-Man asked him whether the man born blind who was in his path was in that condition because of his own sins or those of his parents, the divine Master answered them: " *It is not because he has sinned, nor those who brought him into the world"* (that is to say, it is not because his parents or he himself committed any crime, of which his condition is the immediate consequence); *but it is so that the power of God may shine forth in him*. Father de Ligni, whose excellent work you are doubtless familiar with, saw in the answer I have just quoted proof that not all illnesses are the result of a crime: how do you understand this text, if you please?

THE COUNT

In the most natural way. First, I ask you to note that the disciples were certain of one or the other of these two propositions: *that the man born blind shared the punishment for his own sins, or for those of his ancestors*; which agrees wonderfully with the ideas I have presented to you on this point. Second, I observe that the divine response presents only the idea of a simple exception that confirms the law instead of undermining it. I understand perfectly that this blindness could have no other cause than the solemn manifestation of a power that came to change the world. The renowned Bonnet of Geneva drew upon the miracle performed on the man born blind as the subject of an interesting chapter in his book on the *Truth of the Christian Religion*, because indeed one would be hard-pressed to find in all of history—I would even say in all of sacred history—any event where the truth is clothed in such striking characteristics, so apt to compel conviction. Finally, if one wished to speak strictly, one could say that, in a more distant sense, this blindness was also a consequence of original sin, without which the Redemption, like all the works that accompanied and proved it, would never have taken place. I am very familiar with Father de Ligni's valuable work, and I even recall (something you may have missed) that, to confirm his argument, he asks where the physical ailments suffered by children baptized before the age at which they could sin come from? But, without failing to show due respect to a man of such merit, it seems to me that we cannot avoid recognizing here

one of those distractions to which we are all more or less subject when writing. The physical state of the world, which is the result of the fall and degradation of man, cannot vary until a future epoch which must be as general as the one of which it is the consequence. The spiritual regeneration of the individual man has and cannot have any influence on these laws. The child suffers just as he dies, because he belongs to a mass which must suffer and die because it has been degraded in its origin, and by virtue of the sad law which has flowed from it, every man, because he is man, is subject to all the evils which can afflict man. Everything thus brings us back to this great truth, that all evil, or to speak more clearly, all pain *is* a punishment imposed for some actual or original crime . If this hereditary nature of suffering troubles you, forget, if you wish, everything I have said on this point; for I have no need of this consideration to establish my first assertion, that one is not understanding oneself when one complains *that the wicked are happy in this world, and the righteous unhappy.* Since nothing is truer than the contrary proposition, to justify the ways of Providence, even in the temporal order, it is not at all necessary that crime be punished *always* and without delay. Again, it is peculiar that man cannot be made to be as just toward God as toward his fellow men: who has ever thought of maintaining that there is neither order nor justice in a state because two or three criminals have escaped the courts? The only difference between the two systems of justice is that ours lets guilty people go through impotence or corruption, while the other, if it sometimes *seems* not to perceive crimes, only suspends its blows for noble reasons that are not, by any means, beyond the grasp of our understanding.

THE KNIGHT

For my part, I no longer wish to quibble on this point, especially since I am not in my element here, having read very few books on metaphysics in my life; but allow me to point out a contradiction that has constantly struck me since I have been caught up in this great whirlwind of the world, which is also a great book, as you know. On the one hand, everyone celebrates the happiness, even the temporal happiness, of virtue. The first verses that entered my memory are those of Louis Racine, in his poem on *Religion*:

> Adorable virtue, how divine your charms...

And the rest. You know this: my mother taught it to me when I couldn't yet read; and I can still see myself on her lap, repeating that beautiful tirade that I will never forget. I find nothing, in truth, that isn't perfectly reasonable in the sentiments it expresses, and sometimes I've been tempted to believe that all humankind agrees on this point; for, on the one hand, there is a kind of consensus to extol the happiness of virtue: books are full of it; theaters resound with it; there is no poet who hasn't striven to express this truth in a vivid and moving way. Racine made these sweet and encouraging words resonate in the consciences of princes: "*Everywhere I am blessed, I am loved*"; and there is no man to whom this happiness cannot belong more or less, according to the extent of the sphere whose center he occupies. In our everyday conversations, we commonly say *that the fortune of such and such a merchant*, for example, is not at all surprising; *that it is due to his probity, his punctuality, his thrift, which have earned him universal esteem and trust*. Who among us has not heard the common people say a thousand times: "*God bless that family; they are good people who have compassion for the poor; it's no wonder everything goes their way"?* In the world, even the most frivolous, there is no subject more readily discussed than the advantages of the honest man alone over the wealthiest scoundrel; there is no power more universal, more irresistible than that of virtue. We must admit, if even temporal happiness is not found there, where will it be?

But, on the other hand, a no less general concert shows us, from one end of the universe to the other,

> Innocence on its knees, offering its throat to crimes.

It seems that virtue exists in this world only to suffer, to be martyred by brazen and ever-unpunished vice. We speak only of the successes of audacity, fraud, and bad faith; we never tire of the eternal disappointment of naive probity. Everything is given over to intrigue, cunning, corruption, and so on. I cannot recall without laughing the letter of a witty man who wrote to his friend, speaking of a certain acquaintance who had just obtained a distinguished position: M*** certainly deserved this position in every respect, HOWEVER, *he obtained it*.

Indeed, one is sometimes tempted, upon closer examination, to believe that vice, in most matters, has a decisive advantage over probity: explain this contradiction to me, I beg you; it has struck me a thousand times: the vast majority of people seem convinced of two opposing propositions. Weary of grappling with this tiresome problem, I have finally stopped thinking about it.

THE COUNT

Before giving you my opinion, Monsieur le Chevalier, allow me, if you please, to congratulate you on having read Louis Racine before Voltaire. His muse, heir (I do not say universal) to another, more illustrious muse, should be dear to all teachers; for she is a *family muse*, who sang only of reason and virtue. If this poet's voice is not brilliant, it is at least gentle and always true. His *Sacred Poems* are full of thought, feeling, and unction. Rousseau preceded him in society and in the academies: but in the Church, I would side with Racine. I have congratulated you on having begun with him; I must congratulate you even more on having learned him at the knee of your excellent mother, whom I deeply venerated during her life, and whom I am sometimes tempted to invoke today. It is undoubtedly our sex's role to train geometers, tacticians, chemists, and so on; but what we call *man* —that is, moral man—is perhaps formed by the age of ten; and if he has not been formed *on his mother's lap*, it will always be a great misfortune. Nothing can replace this education. If the mother, above all, has made it her duty to deeply imprint the divine character upon her son's brow, one can be almost certain that the hand of vice will never erase it. The young man may stray, no doubt; but he will trace, if you will allow me this expression, a *re-entrant curve* that will bring him back to the point from which he started.

THE KNIGHT, *laughing*

Do you believe, my good friend, that the curve, with regard to me, is beginning to *reverse*?

THE COUNT

I have no doubt about it; and I can even give you a swift demonstration: *it's because you're here*. What charm draws you away from social gatherings and pleasures to bring you each evening to two elderly men whose conversation promises you nothing amusing? Why, at this moment, do you listen to me with pleasure? It's because you bear on your forehead that mark I mentioned earlier. Sometimes, when I see you approaching from afar, I also think I see your mother at your side, dressed in a luminous garment, pointing out this terrace where we await you. Your mind, I know, still seems resistant to certain knowledge; but that's solely because all truth requires preparation. One day, have no doubt, you will experience it; and I must congratulate you today on the sagacity with which you perceived and brought to light a great human contradiction, which I had not yet considered, although it is truly striking. Yes, no doubt, Sir, you are right: humankind is never short of either the joys or the calamities of virtue. But first, one could say to people: *Since loss and gain seem to balance each other out, decide, in your doubt, on this virtue which is so lovable*, especially since we are not reduced to such a balance. Indeed, the contradiction you just mentioned, you will find it everywhere, since the entire universe obeys two forces. I will, in turn, give you an example: you go to the theater more often than we do. Do the beautiful speeches of Lusignan, Polyeucte, Mérope, etc., ever fail to excite the liveliest enthusiasm? Do you recall a single sublime act of filial piety, of conjugal love, of piety itself, that was not deeply felt and met with applause? Go back the next day, and you will hear the same reaction to Figaro's verses. It's the same contradiction we were discussing earlier; but in fact, there isn't really a contradiction, because the opposition isn't on the same subject. You read it just as we did:

My God, what a cruel war!

I find two men within myself.

THE KNIGHT

No doubt, and I even believe that everyone is obliged in conscience to exclaim like Louis XIV: Ah! how well I know those two men!

THE COUNT

Well! There you have the solution to your problem and to so many others that are really just the same in different forms. *A man* quite rightly extols the advantages, even temporal ones, of virtue, and *another man* within the same man will prove, a moment later, that virtue exists on earth only to be persecuted, reviled, and slaughtered by crime. What have you heard in the world? Two men who disagree. Truly, there is nothing surprising in that; but these two men are far from being equals. It is right reason, it is conscience, that says what it clearly sees: that in all professions, in all undertakings, in all affairs, the advantage, all other things being equal, always lies with virtue; that health, the foremost of temporal goods, and without which all others are nothing, is partly its doing; that it finally fills us with an inner contentment more precious a thousand times than all the treasures of the universe.

On the contrary, it is rebellious or resentful pride, envy, avarice, and impiety that complain of the temporal disadvantages of virtue. It is therefore no longer man, or else it is *another man*.

In his words even more than in his actions, man is too often determined by the passion of the moment, and above all by what we call *mood*. In this regard, I want to quote an ancient, even classical, author whose works I greatly regret, because of the power and profound wisdom that shine forth in the fragments that remain. This is the serious Ennius, who once had these strange maxims sung on the Roman stage:

I said that there are gods; I will say it again and again:

But, I also say, their profound wisdom

He never meddled in earthly matters.

If I were wrong, wouldn't we see them?

Reward the righteous and punish the guilty?

Alas! That is not the case...

And Cicero tells us, I don't remember where, that this piece was met with applause.

But in the same century and on the same stage, Plautus was surely at least as applauded when he said:

From the heights of his holy abode.

A God who is always watching over us watches us walk;

He sees us, hears us, watches us at all hours.

And the darkest night cannot hide us.

Here, I believe, is a rather fine example of this great human contradiction. Here it is the wise man, the poet-philosopher, who is irrational; and it is the amiable joker who preaches marvelously.

But if you will follow me, let us leave Rome and go for a moment to Jerusalem. A rather short psalm has said it all on the subject that concerns us. Ready to confess some doubts that had once arisen in his soul, the King-Prophet, author of this beautiful canticle, feels obliged to condemn them in advance by beginning with a surge of love; he exclaims: *How good our God is to all who have a righteous heart!*

After this beautiful movement, he will be able to readily confess his old anxieties: *I was scandalized, and I almost felt my faith waver when I contemplated the tranquility of the wicked. I heard people around me say: Does* God see them? *And I said to myself: So it was in vain that I followed the path of innocence! I strove to penetrate this mystery that wearyed my mind.*

These are indeed doubts which have arisen more or less vividly in all minds; these are what are called, in ascetic style, temptations; and he hastens to tell us that the truth was not long in silencing them.

But I finally understood this mystery when I entered the sanctuary of the Lord, when I saw the end he had prepared for the guilty. I was mistaken, O God! You punish their secret schemes; you overthrow the wicked; you overwhelm them with calamities: in an instant they perished; they perished because of their iniquity, and you made them vanish like a dream of a man waking.

Having thus renounced all the sophisms of the mind, he knows only how to love. He cries out: *What can I desire in Heaven? What can I love on earth except you alone? My flesh and blood are consumed with love; you are my portion for eternity. He who turns away from you marches to his ruin like an unfaithful wife pursued by vengeance; but for me, there is no other happiness than to cling to you, to hope only in you, to celebrate before men the wonders of my God.*

Here is our master and our model; in these kinds of matters, we must never begin with a contentious pride, which is a crime because it argues against God, leading straight to blindness. We must exclaim first and foremost: *How good You are!* and suppose that there is some error in our minds that simply needs to be unraveled. With this disposition, we will soon find peace, which will rightly elude us as long as we do not ask it of its Author. I grant reason all that it deserves. Man received it only to use it; and we have sufficiently demonstrated, I think, that it is not greatly troubled by the difficulties raised against it by Providence. However, let us not rely exclusively on a light too easily eclipsed by those *darknesses of the heart*, ever ready to arise between truth and us. *Let us enter the sanctuary!* That's where all scruples, all scandals vanish. Doubt is like those pesky flies you shoo away, but they always come back. It may well fly away at the first sign of reason; but Religion kills it, and frankly, that's a bit better.

THE SENATOR

I followed you with great pleasure on your excursion to Jerusalem; but allow me to add to your ideas by pointing out that it is not always impiety, ignorance, or frivolity that is dazzled by the sophistry you attack with such sound reasoning. The injustice is so great in this regard, and the error so deeply rooted, that even the wisest writers, seduced or bewildered by senseless complaints, end up expressing themselves like the crowd and seem to pass condemnation on this point. You quoted Louis Racine earlier: recall that line from the tirade you had in mind:

> Fortune, it is true, wealth eludes you.

Nothing could be further from the truth: not only do riches not flee virtue, but on the contrary, the only truly honorable and lasting riches are those acquired and possessed through virtue. The others are despised and fleeting. Yet here is a wise man, a deeply religious man, who comes to repeat to us, after a thousand others, *that wealth and virtue are intertwined*; but no doubt he, too, after a thousand others, had repeated many times in his life the ancient, universal, infallible adage: *Ill-gotten gains never prosper*. Thus, we are forced to believe that riches flee equally from vice and virtue. Where, then, are they, for goodness' sake? If we had moral observations, as we have meteorological observations; if tireless observers cast a penetrating eye on the history of families, we would see that ill-gotten gains are so many anathemas whose fulfillment is inevitable for individuals or families.

But there is a hidden error among the writers of the right party who have addressed this subject, an error that seems to me to deserve to be exposed. They see in the prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of virtue strong proof of the immortality of the soul, or, what amounts to the same thing, of the pains and rewards of the afterlife. They are therefore inclined, perhaps without realizing it, to close their eyes to the sufferings of this world, for fear of weakening the proofs of a truth of the first order upon which the entire edifice of Religion rests. But I dare to believe that in this they are wrong. It is neither necessary, nor even, I think, permissible, to disarm, so to speak, one truth in order to arm another. Each truth can defend itself: why make admissions that are not necessary?

Please read, as soon as you have the time, the critical reflections of the illustrious Leibniz on the principles of Puffendorf: you will read there in its own words that the punishments of another life are demonstrated by the very

fact that it has pleased the Sovereign Master of all things to leave in this life *most crimes unpunished and most virtues unrewarded*.

But do not believe that he leaves us the trouble of refuting him. He hastens, in the same work, to refute himself with the superiority which belongs to him; he expressly acknowledges *that even abstracting from the other punishments which God bestows in this world in the manner of human legislators, he would not show himself to be less a legislator in this life, since by virtue of the laws alone and the nature which he has borne with such wisdom, every wicked person is a* HEAUTONTIMORUMENOS 19.

One could not say it better; but tell me yourselves how it is possible that, God *having pronounced punishments in this life in the manner* of legislators, and every wicked person being, moreover, and by virtue of natural law, a self-perpetrator, *most crimes remain unpunished*. The illusion I spoke of earlier and the strength of prejudice are here laid bare. I will not undertake needlessly to bring them into greater light, but I wish to cite to you yet another man superior in his field, and whose ascetic works are unquestionably one of the finest gifts that talent has bestowed upon piety: Father Berthier. I recall that, based on these words of a psalm: " *A little while, and the wicked will be no more; you seek their place, and you will not find it*," he observes that if the prophet did not have in mind blessed eternity, his proposition would be false; *for*, he said, *the good men have perished, and we do not know where they lived on earth; they did not possess riches during their lives, and we do not see that they were more at ease than the wicked, who, despite the excesses of passions, seem to have the privilege of* HEALTH AND A VERY LONG LIFE.

It is difficult to understand how a thinker of such stature could have allowed himself to be blinded by vulgar prejudice to the point of disregarding the most tangible truths. " *Good men*," he says, " *have perished*." – But no one, I think, has yet argued that good people should have the privilege of not dying. *We do not know where they lived on earth*. – First of all, what does it matter? Besides, is the tomb of the wicked more well-known than that of the good, all things being equal in terms of birth, occupation, and lifestyle? Were Louis XI or Peter the Cruel more famous or richer than Saint Louis or Charlemagne? Did not Suger and Ximénez live more peaceful lives, and are they not less famous after their deaths than Sejanus or Pombal? What follows on *the privilege of health and a longer life* is perhaps one of the most terrible proofs of the strength of a general prejudice over minds most made to escape it.

But what happened to Father Berthier is what happened to Leibniz, and what will happen to all men of their kind: they refute themselves with a force and clarity worthy of them; and moreover, in Father Berthier's case, with an unction worthy of a master who rivals Fénelon in the paths of spiritual knowledge. In several places in his works, he acknowledges that even on earth there is no happiness except in virtue; that our passions are our tormentors; *that the abyss of happiness lies in the abyss of charity; that if there were an evangelical* city, it would be a place worthy of the angels' admiration, and that one would have to leave everything to go and contemplate these blessed mortals up close. Filled with these ideas, he addresses God himself somewhere; he says to him: *Is it then true that, besides the happiness that awaits me in the next life, I can still be happy in this one?* Please read the spiritual works of this learned and holy person; you will easily find the various passages I have in mind, and I am sure that you will thank me for having introduced you to these books.

THE KNIGHT

Now admit it, my dear senator, that you want to seduce me and draw me into your favorite readings. Surely your proposition isn't directed at your smiling *accomplice*. Besides, I promise you, if I do begin, I'll start with Father Berthier.

THE SENATOR

I urge you with all my heart not to delay; in the meantime, I am glad to have shown you science and holiness mistaken at first, and reasoning like the crowd, led astray by a noble motive, but soon letting themselves be brought back by the evidence and giving themselves the most solemn rebuttal.

So, if I am mistaken, these are two clearly evident errors: the error of pride, which rejects the obvious in order to justify its culpable objections; and, moreover, the error of virtue, which allows itself to be seduced by the desire

to reinforce one truth, even at the expense of another. But there is yet a third error that must not be passed over in silence: this multitude of people who constantly speak of the *successes* of crime, without knowing what happiness and unhappiness are. Listen to the Misanthrope, whom I will have speak for them:

> We know that this *flat foot*, worthy of being mistaken for,
>
> He has pushed himself into the world through dirty jobs;
>
> And that through them his destiny, clothed in splendor,
>
> It makes merit blush and virtue rumble.
>
> However, his grimace is welcome everywhere;
>
> He is welcomed, he is laughed at; he insinuates himself everywhere;
>
> And if there is a rank to be contested through intrigue,
>
> We see the more honest man prevail.

The theater pleases us so much precisely because it is the eternal accomplice of all our vices and errors. An honest man should not vie for a position *through intrigue*, and even less so with a *scoundrel*. We constantly hear the cry: " *All jobs, all ranks, all distinctions are for men who do not deserve them*." First of all, nothing could be further from the truth: besides, by what right do we call all these things *"good"*? You quoted a charming epigram just now, Monsieur le Chevalier: " *He deserved that position in every respect*; YET *he obtained it*." This is wonderful if it's only a matter of laughter; but if we must reason, that's another matter. I would like to share with you a thought that came to me one day while reading a sermon by your admirable Bourdaloue; but I fear you will once again call me a *fanatic*.

THE KNIGHT

What on earth, *again! I never said that*. I only said, which is quite different, *that if certain people heard you, they might well call you a crackpot*. Besides, there are no *such people* here; and even if there were, even if what we say were to be printed, we shouldn't worry about it. What one believes to be true must be said, and said boldly. *I would like, even at great cost to myself*, to uncover a truth destined to shock all humankind: I would tell it to them point-blank.

If you are ever drafted into an army that Providence is currently raising in Europe, you will be placed among the grenadiers; but here is what I wanted to tell you. I was reading one day in some sermon by Bourdaloue, I don't know, a passage where he maintains, without the slightest reservation, *that it is not permissible to ask for positions*. To tell you the truth, I initially took this for mere advice, or for one of those ideals of perfection, useless in practice, and I passed over it; but soon reflection brought me back, and I quickly found in this text the subject of a long and serious meditation. Certainly, a large part of society's ills stems from those in positions of authority, poorly chosen by the prince; but most of these bad choices are the work of ambition, which has deceived him. If everyone waited for the choice to be made instead of striving to determine it by every possible means, I am inclined to believe that the world would be transformed. By what right does anyone dare say, " *I am better than anyone else for this job* "? For that is what one says when applying for it. What an enormous responsibility one assumes! There is a hidden order that one risks disturbing. I go further; I say that every man, if he carefully examines himself and others, and all the circumstances, will be able to distinguish very well between cases where one is called upon and those where one forces one's way in. This stems from an idea that may seem paradoxical to you; make of it what you will. It seems to me that the existence and functioning of governments cannot be explained by human means, any more than the movement of bodies can be explained by mechanical means. **Mens agitat molem* *. In every empire there is a *guiding spirit* (allow me to borrow this word from chemistry, distorting it in my own way) that animates it as the soul animates the body, and that produces death when it withdraws.

THE COUNT

You give a new name, quite a felicitous one even, it seems to me, to a very simple thing: the necessary intervention of a supernatural power. We admit it in the physical world without excluding the action of secondary causes; why should we not admit it likewise in the political world, where it is no less indispensable? Without its immediate intervention, we cannot explain, as you so rightly say, either the creation or the duration of governments. It is manifest in the national unity that constitutes them; it is manifest in the multiplicity of wills that contribute to the same goal without knowing what they are doing, which shows that they are simply *being used*; it is manifest above all in the marvelous action that makes use, in that multitude of circumstances we call *accidental*, of even our follies and crimes, to maintain order and often to establish it.

THE SENATOR

I don't know if you've fully grasped my point; it doesn't matter for now. Once supernatural power is admitted, however it may be understood, we can certainly trust it; but it cannot be stressed enough that we would be far less mistaken on this subject if we had a more accurate understanding of what we call *good* and *happiness*. We speak of the successes of vice, and we don't know what success truly is; what appears to us as happiness is often a terrible punishment.

THE COUNT

You are quite right, sir; man does not know what is good for him; and philosophy itself has realized this, since it has discovered that man does not know how to pray on his own, and that he needs some divine instructor to come and teach him what he should ask for. If virtue sometimes seems less talented than vice in obtaining riches, positions, etc., if it is clumsy in all kinds of intrigues, so much the better for it, even in temporal matters; there is no error more common than mistaking a blessing for a disgrace: let us never envy crime anything: let it have its sad successes, virtue has others; it has all that it is permitted to desire; and even if it had less, nothing would still be lacking for the just man, since he would still have peace, peace of heart! Inestimable treasure, health of the soul, charm of life, which takes the place of everything, and which nothing can replace? By what inconceivable blindness do we often seem to overlook it? On one side is peace and even glory; a good reputation, at least, is the inseparable companion of virtue, and it is one of life's most delightful pleasures; on the other lies remorse and often also infamy. Everyone agrees on these truths; a thousand writers have brought them to light; and yet we reason as if we didn't know them. However, can we help but contemplate with delight the happiness of the person who can say to themselves each day before falling asleep: *I have not wasted the day*; who sees in their heart no hateful passion, no guilty desire; who falls asleep with the certainty of having done some good, and who awakens with renewed strength to become even better? Strip him, if you will, of all the possessions that men so ardently covet, and compare him to the fortunate, the powerful Tiberius writing from the island of Capri his famous letter to the Roman Senate ; it will not be difficult, I believe, to decide between these two situations. Around the wicked man, I seem to see constantly all the hell of poets, TERRIBILES VISU FORMAE: *devouring worries, pale illnesses, ignoble and premature old age, fear, poverty (that sad advisor), the false joys of the mind, internal warfare, vengeful furies, black melancholy, the sleep of conscience, and death*. The greatest writers have practiced describing the inevitable torment of remorse; But Perseus struck me most of all, when his energetic pen makes us hear, during the horror of a deep night, the voice of a guilty man troubled by dreadful dreams, dragged by his conscience on the moving edge of a bottomless precipice, crying out to himself: *I am lost! I am lost!*and that, to complete the picture, the poet shows us innocence sleeping peacefully next to the tortured villain.

THE KNIGHT

Truly, you frighten the *grenadier*; but here is yet another of those contradictions we noted earlier. Everyone speaks of the happiness attached to virtue, and everyone also speaks of that terrible torment of remorse; but it seems that these truths are mere theories; and when it comes to reasoning about Providence, they are forgotten as if they were null and void in practice. There is both error and ingratitude here. Now that I reflect on it, I see great absurdity in complaining about the misfortunes of innocence. It is precisely as if one were complaining that God delights in making happiness unhappy.

THE COUNT

Do you know, Sir Knight, that Seneca could not have said it better! God, indeed, has given everything to those whom he has preserved or delivered from vice. Thus, to say that crime is fortunate in this world, and innocence unfortunate, is a true contradiction in terms; it is precisely to say that poverty is rich and opulence poor; but such is man's nature. He will always complain, always argue against his father. It is not enough that God has attached ineffable happiness to the practice of virtue; it is not enough that he has promised him the greatest and most incomparable share in the general distribution of the world's goods; these foolish minds, *whose reasoning has banished reason,* will not be satisfied: their righteous imagination must absolutely remain impassive, no harm must befall them; the rain must not wet them; the mildew must respectfully stop at the boundaries of their field; and that, if by chance he forgets to push his bolts, God should be obliged to send to his door an angel with a flaming sword, lest a happy thief come and take away the gold and jewels of the RIGHTEOUS.

THE KNIGHT

I also catch you joking, Mr. Philosopher, but I am careful not to quarrel with you, for I fear reprisals; I also readily agree that, in this case, the joke may appear in the middle of a serious discussion; one could not imagine anything more unreasonable than this silent claim that would have every righteous person steeped in the Styx, and rendered inaccessible to all the blows of fate.

THE COUNT

I don't quite know what *fate* is; but I confess that, for my part, I see something even more unreasonable than what seems to you to be the height of unreason: it is the inconceivable folly that dares to base arguments against Providence on the misfortunes of innocence, *which does not exist*. Where is justice? Is it here, around this table? Great God, indeed! Who could possibly believe such an excess of delirium, if we were not witnesses to it at every moment? I often think of that passage in the Bible where it says: " *I will visit Jerusalem with lamps*." Let us ourselves have the courage to visit our hearts *with lamps*, and we will no longer dare to utter the words *virtue*, *justice*, and *innocence* except with a blush. Let us begin by examining the evil within us, and grow pale as we cast a courageous gaze into the depths of that abyss; For it is impossible to know the number of our transgressions, and no less impossible to know to what extent any particular culpable act has harmed the general order and thwarted the plans of the eternal Lawgiver. Let us then consider this appalling communication of crimes that exists among men: *complicity*, *counsel*, *example*, *approval* —terrible words that should be constantly pondered. What sensible person can think without shuddering of the disordered action they have exerted on their fellow human beings, and of the possible consequences of this disastrous influence? Rarely does a person commit a crime alone; rarely does one crime not produce another. Where are the limits of responsibility? Hence this luminous passage that shines forth among a thousand others in the Book of Psalms: *What man can know the full extent of his transgressions? O God! cleanse me of the sins I do not know, and forgive me also the sins of others.*

Having thus reflected upon our crimes, another, perhaps even sadder, examination presents itself to us: that of our virtues. What a frightening inquiry it would be to investigate the small number, the falseness, and the inconstancy of these virtues! We would first have to probe their foundations: alas! they are determined far more by prejudice than by considerations of the general order founded on divine will. An action revolts us far less because it is *evil* than because it is *shameful*. Let two common men fight, each armed with a knife, and they are two *scoundrels*; but lengthen the weapons and attach to the crime an idea of nobility and independence, and it will be the action of a gentleman. And the sovereign, overcome by prejudice, cannot help *but honor* the crime committed against *himself*: that is to say, rebellion compounded by murder. The criminal wife calmly speaks of *the infamy* of an unfortunate woman whom misery led to a visible weakness; and from a gilded balcony, the cunning squanderer of the public treasury watches the wretched servant who stole a crown from his master walk to the gallows. There is a profound remark in a purely entertaining book: I read it exactly forty years ago, and the impression it made on me then has not faded. It is in a moral tale by Marmontel. A peasant whose daughter has been dishonored by a nobleman says to this brilliant corrupter: " *You are very fortunate, sir, not to love gold as much as women: you would have been a Cartouche*." What do we commonly do all our lives? *What pleases us*. If we deign to refrain from stealing and killing, it is because we have no desire to do so; *for that is not done*:

Sed si

Candida vicini subrisit soft puella,

Cor tibi rite salit... 21?

It is not crime we fear, but dishonor; and provided that public opinion dispels shame, or even substitutes glory for it, as it so readily does, we commit the crime boldly, and the man thus disposed calls himself, without pretense, just, or at least *an honest man*: and who knows if he doesn't thank God *for not being like one of those*? It is a delusion that should make us blush at the slightest reflection on it. It was doubtless with profound wisdom that the Romans called *strength* and *virtue* by the same name. Indeed, there is no virtue properly speaking, without victory over ourselves, and everything that costs us nothing is worth nothing. Let us remove from our wretched virtues what we owe to temperament, honor, public opinion, pride, powerlessness, and circumstances; what will remain? Alas! Very little. I do not hesitate to confess it to you; I never contemplate this dreadful subject without being tempted to throw myself to the ground like a guilty man begging for mercy; without accepting in advance all the evils that might befall me, as a small compensation for the immense debt I have incurred toward eternal justice. Yet you would not believe how many people in my life have told me that I am *a very honest man*.

THE KNIGHT

I think, I assure you, just like those people, and here I am, quite ready to lend you money without witnesses or a promissory note, without even considering whether you might be tempted not to repay me. But tell me, I beg you, haven't you unwittingly harmed your cause by showing us this public thief, who, from *a gilded balcony*, watches the preparations for a torture far more suited to him than to the unfortunate victim about to perish? Aren't you, without realizing it, leading us back *to the triumph of vice and the misfortunes of innocence*?

THE COUNT

No, truly, my dear knight, I am not contradicting myself at all: it is you, with your permission, who are distracted by speaking to us of the misfortunes of innocence. We should have spoken only *of the triumph of vice*: for the servant who is hanged for stealing a crown from his master is not at all *innocent*. If the law of the land prescribes the death penalty for all domestic theft, every servant knows that if he steals from his master, he exposes himself to death. Whether other, far more serious crimes are neither known nor punished is another matter: but, as for him, he has no right to complain. He is guilty according to the law; he is judged according to the law; he is sent to his death according to the law: he is not wronged. And as for the public thief, of whom we were speaking just now, you have not quite grasped my point. I did not say that he was happy; I did not say that his misdeeds would never be known or punished; I only said that the guilty man had, *until now*, the skill to conceal his crimes and is considered what is called an *honest man*. He is, however, far from being so in the eyes of the all-seeing eye. If, therefore, gout, or kidney stones, or some other terrible consequence of human justice, were to make him pay for the *gilded balcony*, do you see any injustice in that? Now, the supposition I am making at this moment is realized every instant in every corner of the globe. If there are certain truths for us, it is that man has no means of judging hearts; that conscience, which we are inclined to judge most favorably, can be horribly defiled in the eyes of God; that there is no innocent man in this world; that all evil is a punishment, and that the judge who condemns us to it is infinitely just and good: that is enough, it seems to me, for us to at least learn to be silent.

But allow me, before finishing, to share a thought that has always struck me extremely: perhaps it will make no less of an impression on your minds.

There is no righteous person on earth. He who uttered this phrase became himself a great and sorrowful proof of the astonishing contradictions of humankind. But this imaginary righteous person, I am willing to imagine for a moment, and I will heap upon them every possible evil. I ask you, who has the right to complain in this scenario? It is the seemingly righteous; it is the suffering righteous. But that is precisely what will never happen. I cannot help but think at this moment of that young girl who has become famous in that great city, among the benevolent people who consider it their sacred duty to seek out misfortune in order to help it. She is eighteen years old; for

five years she has been tormented by a horrible cancer that is consuming her head. Already her eyes and nose have disappeared, and the disease is advancing on her virginal flesh like a fire devouring a palace. In the throes of the most acute suffering, a tender and almost heavenly pity detaches her entirely from earthly things, and seems to render her inaccessible or indifferent to pain. She does not say, like the pompous Stoic, " *O pain! Try as you might, you will never make me admit that you are an evil*." She does far better: she does not speak of it. Never have words of love, submission, and gratitude passed from her lips. The unwavering resignation of this girl has become a kind of spectacle; and just as in the early centuries of Christianity, people went to the circus out of simple curiosity to see *Blandina*, *Agatha*, *and Perpetua* thrown to the lions or wild bulls, and more than one spectator returned home quite surprised to find themselves a Christian, so too do curious onlookers come to your noisy city to contemplate the young martyr *delivered to cancer*. As she has lost her sight, they can approach her without disturbing her, and many have reported back the most beautiful thoughts. One day, when someone expressed particular compassion for her long and agonizing bouts of insomnia, she replied, " *I am not as unhappy as you think; God grants me the grace to think only of Him*." And when a kind man, whom you know, Senator, asked her one day, " *What is the first grace you will ask of God, my dear child, when you stand before Him?"* she answered with evangelical naiveté, " *I will ask Him for the grace of loving my benefactors as much as I love them."*

Certainly, gentlemen, if innocence exists anywhere in the world, it lies on this bed of suffering to which the course of our conversation has just brought us for a moment; and if reasonable complaints could be addressed to Providence, they would come precisely from the mouth of this pure victim who knows only how to bless and love. Now, what we see here has always been seen, and will be seen until the end of time. The closer humanity approaches this state of justice, the perfection of which does not belong to our weak nature, the more you will find it loving and resigned even in the cruellest situations of life. Strange thing! It is crime that complains of the sufferings of virtue! It is always the guilty one, *happy* as he wishes to be, immersed in delights and overflowing with the only goods he values, who dares to quarrel with Providence when it sees fit to refuse these same goods to virtue! Who then gave these reckless people the right to speak in the name of the virtue that disavows them with horror, and to interrupt with insolent blasphemies the prayers, offerings and voluntary sacrifices of love?

THE KNIGHT

Ah, my dear friend, how grateful I am! I cannot express how deeply touched I am by this thought, which had never occurred to me. I carry it in my heart, for we must part. It is not yet night, but it is no longer day, and already the darkening waters of the Neva announce the hour of rest. I do not know, moreover, if I will find it. I think I will dream a great deal of the young woman; and no later than tomorrow I will seek out her home.

THE SENATOR

I will take you there.

END OF THIRD INTERVIEW

FOURTH INTERVIEW

THE COUNT

I remember a scruple of Mr. le Chevalier: for a long time, it was necessary to appear not to think about it; because in conversations such as ours, there are real *currents* which make us drift against our will: however, we must return.

THE KNIGHT

I was well aware that we were drifting; but as soon as the sea was perfectly calm and free of reefs, and we lacked neither time nor provisions, and moreover (which seems to me the essential point) had nothing to do at

home, all that remained for me was the pleasure of seeing the world. Besides, since you wish to *return*, I haven't forgotten that, during our second conversation, a remark you made about prayer caused me some distress, awakening in my mind ideas that had preoccupied it more than once: please remind me of yours.

THE COUNT

This is how I came to speak to you about prayer. Since all evil is a punishment, it follows that no evil can be considered necessary, since it could have been prevented. The temporal order is, on this point as on so many others, the image of a higher order. Punishments being made necessary only by crimes, and every crime being the act of free will, it follows that all punishment could have been prevented, since the crime could have simply not been committed. I would add that even after it has been committed, punishment can still be prevented in two ways: first, the merits of the guilty party, or even those of their ancestors, can counterbalance their fault; second, their fervent supplications, or those *of their friends,* can disarm the sovereign.

One of the things philosophy constantly reminds us is that we must beware of making God like ourselves. I accept this view, provided it in turn accepts that of religion, *that we should strive to be like God*. Divine justice can be contemplated and studied in our own, far more than we realize. Do we not know that we were created in *the image of God*, and have we not been commanded to strive to *become perfect like Him?* I understand that these words should not be taken literally; but they always show us what we are, since the slightest resemblance to the Supreme Being is a title of glory that no mind can conceive. Since resemblance has nothing to do with equality, we are merely exercising our rights by glorifying ourselves in this resemblance. He Himself declared Himself our Father and the *friend of our souls*. The God-man called us his *friends*, his *children*, and even his *brothers*, and his apostles never ceased to repeat the precept to *be like him*. There is therefore not the slightest doubt about this august likeness; but humanity has made a twofold error concerning God: sometimes, it has made him like humanity by attributing our passions to him; sometimes, on the contrary, it has erred in a way that is even more humiliating to his nature by refusing to recognize in him the divine features of his model. If humanity knows how to discover and contemplate these features, it will not err in judging God according to his beloved creature. It suffices to judge him according to all the virtues, that is to say, according to all the perfections contrary to our passions; perfections to which every person feels capable, and which we are compelled to admire in the depths of our hearts, even when they are foreign to us.

And do not be seduced by modern theories about the immensity of God, about our own insignificance, and about the folly of trying to judge Him by ourselves: fine phrases that do not aim to exalt God, but to degrade humanity. Intelligences can only differ in perfection, just as similar figures can only differ in size. The curve that Uranus traces in space, and the one that encloses the germ of a hummingbird beneath its shell, undoubtedly differ immensely. Refine the latter further down to the atom, open the former into infinity, and they will still be two ellipses, and you will represent them with the same formula. If there were no real connection or resemblance between divine intelligence and our own, how could one have united with the other, and how could humankind, even after its degradation, exercise such a striking dominion over the creatures that surround it? When, at the beginning of things, God said, " *Let us make humankind in our image*," he immediately added, " *And let them rule over all that breathes*." This is the original title of the divine investiture: for humankind reigns on earth only because it is like God. Let us never fear to exalt ourselves too much and weaken the ideas we should have of divine immensity. To place infinity between two terms, it is not necessary to lower one; it suffices to raise the other without limits. Images of God on earth, all that is good in us resembles him; And you cannot imagine how much this sublime resemblance is capable of clarifying a multitude of questions. Do not be surprised, then, if I insist at length on this point. Let us, for example, have no qualms about believing and saying that one prays to God as one prays to a sovereign, and that prayer, in the higher order as in the other, has the power to obtain graces and prevent evils: this can further constrict the dominion of evil to equally unassignable limits.

THE KNIGHT

I must tell you frankly: the point you just raised is one where, without seeing any formal denial in my mind (for I have developed a general theory on these kinds of matters that protects me from any positive error), I nevertheless see the objects only in a confused way. I never mocked my priest when he threatened his parishioners

with hail or mildew because they hadn't paid their tithes; however, I observe such an invariable order in physical phenomena that I don't quite understand how the prayers of these poor little men could have any influence on them. Electricity, for example, is as necessary to the world as fire or light: and since it cannot do without electricity, how could it do without thunder? Lightning is a meteor like dew; the former is terrible for us; but what does that matter to nature, which fears nothing? When a meteorologist, through a series of precise observations, ascertains that a certain country receives a certain amount of rainfall annually, he laughs at public prayers for rain. I don't approve of this; but why hide from you that the jokes of physicists make me feel a certain inner unease, which I distrust all the less because I would like to banish it? Again, I don't wish to argue against received wisdom; but in the meantime, must we then pray for lightning to become civilized, for tigers to be tamed, and for volcanoes to be nothing more than illuminations? Will the Siberian ask the heavens for olive trees, or the Provençal for a klukwa?

And what shall we say of war, the eternal subject of our supplications or our thanksgivings? Everywhere victory is demanded, without being able to shake the general rule that awards it *to the largest battalions*. Injustice, beneath its laurels, dragging in its wake the vanquished and stripped of justice, does it not come to deafen us every day with these unbearable *Te Deums*? Good God! What does heavenly protection have in common with all these horrors I have seen too closely? Every time these hymns of victory have struck my ear, every time I have even thought of them,

I kept seeing all those night thieves

Who, in a hollow path, without drums or noise,

Discreetly armed with sabers and ladders,

They first assassinate five or six sentries;

Then, nimbly ascending the city walls,

Where the poor bourgeois slept safely,

They carry iron and flames into their homes,

They stab husbands, they dishonor wives,

They crush the children, and, weary of so much effort,

They drink other people's wine on heaps of corpses.

The next morning they are taken to the church

To give thanks to God for their noble undertaking;

Singing to him in Latin that he is their worthy support;

That in the burning city nothing would have been done without him;

That one cannot steal from or massacre one's world,

Nor burn the cities if God does not support us.

THE COUNT

Ah! I've caught you there, my dear knight, you quote Voltaire; I am not severe enough to deprive you of the pleasure of recalling in passing some happy words that fell from that sparkling pen; but you quote him as an authority, and that is not permitted in my house.

THE KNIGHT

Oh! my dear friend, you are also too resentful towards *François-Marie Arouet*; however he no longer exists: how can one keep so much resentment against the dead?

THE COUNT

But his works are not dead, they live on, they kill us: it seems to me that my hatred is sufficiently justified.

THE KNIGHT

Very well; but allow me to say, this sentiment, although well founded in its principle, must not make us unjust towards such a beautiful genius, and close our eyes to this universal talent which should be regarded as a brilliant property of France.

THE COUNT

A fine genius indeed, Monsieur le Chevalier; it remains true that in praising Voltaire, one must do so with a certain restraint, I would almost say reluctantly. The unbridled admiration with which too many people surround him is the infallible sign of a corrupt soul. Let no one be mistaken: if someone, while browsing their library, feels drawn to the *Works of Ferney*, God does not love them. The ecclesiastical authority that condemned books *in odium auctoris* has often been mocked; in truth, nothing could be more just: *to refuse the honors of genius to one who abuses his gifts*. If this law were strictly observed, we would soon see the poisoned books disappear. But, since it is not up to us to promulgate it, let us at least refrain from the excess—far more reprehensible than one might think—of exalting guilty writers without restraint, and this one in particular. He unwittingly pronounced a terrible judgment against himself, for it was he who said: " *A corrupt mind was never sublime*." Nothing could be truer, and why is it that Voltaire, with his hundred volumes, was never anything but *charming*? I except tragedy, where the nature of the work forced him to express noble sentiments foreign to his character; and even on the stage, which is his triumph, he does not deceive a trained eye. In his best plays, he resembles his two great rivals as the most skillful hypocrite resembles a saint. I do not intend, moreover, to dispute his dramatic merit; I adhere to my first observation: as soon as Voltaire speaks in his own name, he is merely charming. Nothing can rouse him, not even the Battle of Fontenoy. *He is charming*, they say; I say so too, but I understand that word to be a criticism. Besides, I cannot abide the exaggeration of calling him *universal* Certainly, I see some fine exceptions to this universality. He is hopeless at the ode: and who could be surprised? Deliberate impiety had extinguished in him the divine flame of enthusiasm. He is equally hopeless, even ridiculous, at the lyric drama, his ear having been utterly closed to harmonic beauties as his eyes were to those of art. In the genres that seem most suited to his natural talent, he flounders: he is mediocre, cold, and often (who would believe it?) heavy-handed and coarse in comedy; for the wicked are never comic. For the same reason, he could not write an epigram, the slightest sip of his bile unable to cover fewer than a hundred lines. If he attempts satire, he slips into libel; he is unbearable in history, despite his artistry, his elegance, and the grace of his style; No quality can replace those he lacks: the life of history, gravity, good faith, and dignity. As for his *epic* poem, I have no right to speak of it: for to judge a book, one must have read it, and to read it, one must be awake. A soporific monotony hangs over most of his writings, which have only two subjects, the Bible and its enemies: he blasphemes or he insults. His much-vaunted jest, however, is far from irreproachable: the laughter it provokes is not legitimate; it is a grimace. Have you never noticed that the divine anathema was written on his face? After so many years, there is still time to experience it. Go and contemplate his face in the *Hermitage* Palace: I never look at it without congratulating myself that it was not handed down to us by some chisel, heir to the Greeks, who might perhaps have been able to infuse it with a certain beautiful ideal. Here everything is natural. There is as much truth in this head as there would be in a plaster cast taken from a corpse. Look at this abject brow, untouched by modesty, these two extinct craters where lust and hatred still seem to seethe. This mouth—perhaps I speak poorly, but it's not my fault—this dreadful *grimace*, stretching from ear to ear, and these lips pinched by cruel malice like a spring ready to unleash blasphemy or sarcasm. Don't speak to me of this man; I cannot bear the thought of him. Ah! How much harm he has done us! Like that insect, the bane of gardens, which only attacks the roots of the most precious plants, Voltaire, with his *stinger* Voltaire relentlessly attacks the two roots of society, women and young men; he soaks them in his poisons, which he then transmits from one generation to the next. It is in vain that, to veil unspeakable outrages, his foolish admirers deafen us with sonorous tirades in which he has spoken eloquently of the most revered objects. These willfully blind people do not see that they are thereby sealing the condemnation of this guilty writer. If Fénelon, with the same pen that painted the joys of the Elysium, had written The *Prince*, he would be a thousand times more vile and more guilty than Machiavelli. Voltaire's great crime is the abuse of talent and the deliberate prostitution of

a genius created to celebrate God and virtue. He cannot plead, like so many others, youth, thoughtlessness, the sway of passions, and finally, the sad weakness of our nature. Nothing absolves him: his corruption is of a kind unique to him; it takes root in the very fibers of his heart and is strengthened by all the powers of his intellect. Always allied with sacrilege, it defies God by destroying humanity. With unparalleled fury, this insolent blasphemer goes so far as to declare himself the personal enemy of the savior of mankind; from the depths of his nothingness, he dares to give Him a ridiculous name, and this adorable law that the God-man brought to earth, he calls the INFAMOUS. Abandoned by God, who punishes by withdrawing, he knows no restraint. Other cynics have astonished virtue, Voltaire astonishes vice. He plunges into the mire, he wallows in it, he drinks it in; He surrenders his imagination to the fervor of hell, which lends him all its strength to drag him to the very limits of evil. He invents marvels, monsters that make one pale. Sodom would have banished him. Shameless profaner of the universal language and its greatest names, the lowest of men after those who love him! How can I describe to you what he makes me feel? When I see what he could do and what he did, his inimitable talents inspire in me only a kind of holy rage that defies description. Suspended between admiration and horror, sometimes I wish I could have a statue erected in his honor... by the executioner's hand.

THE KNIGHT

Citizen, let's see your pulse.

THE COUNT

Ah! You quote another of my friends; but I will answer you as he did: *Look at the winter on my head*. These white hairs tell you quite clearly that the time for fanaticism and even simple exaggerations is over for me. Besides, there is a certain *rational anger* that is perfectly in keeping with wisdom; the Holy Spirit himself has declared it expressly free from sin.

THE SENATOR

After our friend's *rational explanation, what more could I add about universal man?* But believe me, my dearest knight, by unfortunately focusing on him, you have just exposed us to the most insidious temptation that can present itself to the human mind: that of believing in the unchanging laws of nature. This system has seductive appearances, and it leads directly to ceasing to pray, that is to say, to losing one's spiritual life; for prayer is the breath of the soul, as I believe Monsieur de Saint-Martin said; and he who no longer prays, no longer lives. " *No religion without prayer*," said that same Voltaire whom you just quoted: nothing could be more evident; and by a necessary consequence, *no prayer*, *no religion*. This is roughly the state to which we have been reduced: for since men have never prayed except by virtue of a revealed religion (or one recognized as such), as they have drawn closer to deism, which is nothing and can do nothing, they have ceased to pray, and now you see them bent over the earth, solely occupied with laws and physical studies, and no longer possessing the slightest sense of their natural dignity. Such is the misfortune of these men that they can no longer even desire their own regeneration, not only for the well-known reason that *one cannot desire what one does not know*, but because they find in their moral stupor some dreadful charm which is a terrible punishment. It is therefore in vain that one would speak to them of what they are and what they should be. Immersed in the divine atmosphere, they refuse to live, *whereas if they would only open their mouths, they would draw forth the spirit*. Such is the man who no longer prays; and if public worship (no further proof of its indispensable necessity would be needed) did not somewhat counteract universal degradation, I believe, on my honor, that we would finally become veritable brutes. Thus, nothing equals the antipathy of the men I speak of toward this worship and its ministers. Sad confidences have taught me that for some, the very atmosphere of a church is a kind of oppressive mofette that literally forces them to leave; while healthy souls feel themselves permeated there by some spiritual dew that has no name, but needs no name, for no one can deny it. Your Vincent of Lérins gave a famous rule regarding religion: he said that one must believe what has ALWAYS been believed, EVERYWHERE, AND BY EVERYONE. There is nothing so true and so generally true. Man, despite his fatal degradation, always bears evident marks of his divine origin, so that every universal belief is always more or less true; that is to say, man may well have covered and, so to speak, *encrusted* the truth with the errors with which he has burdened it; but these errors will be local, and universal truth will always reveal

itself. Now, men have always and everywhere prayed. They may no doubt have prayed badly: they may have asked for what they should not have, or not asked for what they should have, and that is man; but they have always prayed, and that is God. The beautiful system of invariable laws would lead us straight to fatalism and would turn man into a statue. I protest, as my friend did yesterday, that I do not intend to insult reason. I respect it infinitely despite all the harm it has done us; But what is certain is that whenever it contradicts *common sense*, we must reject it like a poisoner. It was common sense that said: *Nothing should happen except what happens, nothing happens except what must happen*. But common sense said: *If you pray, such and such a thing that was meant to happen will not happen*; in which common sense reasoned very well, while reason lacked common sense. And it matters little, moreover, that one can oppose proven truths with certain subtleties from which reasoning cannot immediately extricate itself; for there is no more infallible way of falling into the grossest and most pernicious errors than to reject this or that dogma simply because it suffers an objection that we cannot resolve.

THE COUNT

You are absolutely right, my dear senator: no objection can be admitted against the truth, otherwise the truth would cease to be truth. As soon as its nature is recognized, the insolubility of the objection requires nothing more than a lack of knowledge on the part of the one who cannot resolve it. History, chronology, astronomy, geology, and so on have been called upon as evidence against Moses. Objections vanished before true science; but those who scorned them before any examination, or who examined them only to find the answer, but without ever doubting that one existed, were greatly wise. Even the mathematical objection must be scorned: for it will undoubtedly be a proven truth; but it can never be demonstrated that it contradicts a previously demonstrated truth. Let us posit, for example, that by a sufficient agreement of historical evidence (which I only assume), it is perfectly proven that Archimedes burned Marcellus's fleet with a burning mirror: all the objections of geometry disappear. She may well tell me: "But don't you know that every burning mirror gathers rays at a *quarter of its spherical diameter; that you cannot move the focal point further away without diminishing the heat, unless you enlarge the mirror proportionally enough; and that, even if the Roman fleet were moved as far away as possible, the mirror capable of burning it would have been no smaller than the city of Syracuse? What do you have to say to that?"* – I will tell her: *"I have to say to you that Archimedes burned the Roman fleet with a burning mirror*." Kircher then comes to explain the enigma to me: he rediscovers Archimedes' mirror (*tulit alter honores*), and writers buried in the dust of libraries emerge to bear witness to the genius of this modern scholar: I will greatly admire Kircher; I will even thank him; however, I didn't need him to believe. It was once said to the famous Copernicus: " *If your system were true, Venus would have phases like the Moon; however, it does not; therefore, the entire new theory vanishes*." This was a mathematical objection in the truest sense of the word. Following an ancient tradition whose origin I can no longer recall, he replied: " *I confess that I have no answer; but God will grant the grace that an answer will be found*." Indeed, God granted the grace (but after the great man's death) that Galileo found the telescope with which he observed the phases; so that the *seemingly insoluble objection* became the complement to the demonstration. This example provides an argument that seems to me of the greatest force in religious discussions, and I have used it to advantage on more than one occasion with some intelligent people.

THE KNIGHT

You remind me of an anecdote from my early youth. There was an old Abbé *Poulet* living at my house, a veritable fixture of the château, who had once whipped my father and uncles, and who would have been hanged for the whole family; a bit morose and always grumbling, but otherwise, the best of men. I had gone into his study one day, and the conversation having somehow turned to the arrows of the ancients: " *Do you know*," he said to me, " *Monsieur le Chevalier, what an ancient arrow was, and what its speed was? It was such that the lead packing which served, so to speak, as ballast for the arrow, sometimes heated up from the friction of the air to the point of dissolving!"* I began to laugh. " *Come now, my dear Abbé, you're rambling! Do you think an ancient arrow traveled faster than a modern bullet fired from a rifled arquebus?" You see, however, that this bullet doesn't melt.* He looked at me with a kind of grimacing laugh that would have shown me all his teeth, had he had any, and which meant quite clearly: You're just a *greenhorn*; then he went and took from a worm-eaten side table an old Aristotle *to put flaps on* and brought it to the table. He leafed through it for a few moments; then, tapping with the back of his hand on the spot he had found: *I'm not rambling*, he said; *here is a text that the finest arquebusiers in the world*

will never erase, and he made a mark on the margin with his thumbnail. I have often thought about that lead in ancient arrows, which you are reminding me of again now. If what Aristotle says about it is true, here is yet another truth that must be admitted despite an insoluble objection drawn from physics.

THE COUNT

Undoubtedly, if the fact is proven, which I cannot examine at this moment, it suffices for me to derive from the mass of these facts a general theory, a kind of *formula* that can serve to resolve all particular cases. I mean: "Whenever a proposition is proven by the kind of proof that belongs to it, any objection whatsoever, *even an insoluble one, should no longer be heeded*." It simply follows from the inability to answer that the two propositions, held to be true, are not in any way contradictory; which can always happen when the contradiction is not, as they say, *in the terms*.

THE KNIGHT

I would like to understand this better.

THE COUNT

No authority in the world, for example, has the right to reveal that *three are but one*; for *one* and *three* are known to me, and since the meaning attached to the terms does not change in the two propositions, to want me to believe that three and one are and are not the same thing is to command me to believe on behalf of God that God does not exist. But if I am told that *three persons constitute but one nature*; provided that revelation, still agreeing, though not necessarily, with the most solid speculations of psychology, and even with the more or less obscure traditions of all nations, furnishes me with a sufficient demonstration, I am ready to believe; and it matters little to me that *three* are not *one*, for that is not the point, but whether three *persons* cannot be a *single nature*, which is a completely different question.

THE SENATOR

Indeed, since the contradiction cannot be affirmed either of things, because we do not know them, or of terms, because they have changed, where would it be, if you please? Allow the Stoics, then, to tell us that this proposition, " *it will rain tomorrow*," is as certain and as immutable in the order of destinies as this other one, " *it rained yesterday"*; and allow them further to confound us, if they could, with the most dazzling sophisms. We will let them speak, for the objection, even if insoluble (which I am far from admitting in this case), must not be admitted against the demonstration that results from the innate belief of all humankind. If you take my advice, then, Sir, you will continue to offer the *Rogation* Day prayers at home when you are there. In the meantime, it would even be good to pray to God with all your might that he grant you the grace to return there, while letting those who would object that it is decided in advance whether or not you will see your dear homeland again say the same.

THE COUNT

Although, as you have seen, I am deeply convinced that the general feeling of all people forms, so to speak, truths of intuition before which all the sophisms of reasoning vanish, I nevertheless believe, Senator, that on the present question, we are not at all reduced to feelings; for, first of all, if you look closely, you will sense the sophism without being able to fully understand it. This proposition, " *it rained yesterday*," is no more certain than the other, " *it will rain tomorrow"*: undoubtedly, *if indeed it is going to rain*; but that is precisely the point, so that the question begins anew. Secondly, and this is the main point, I do not see these immutable rules, and this inflexible chain of events of which so much has been said. On the contrary, I see in nature only flexible mechanisms, such as they must be to lend themselves, as necessary, to the action of free beings, which frequently combines on Earth with the material laws of nature. Consider how many ways and to what extent we influence the reproduction of animals and plants. Grafting, for example, is or is not a law of nature, depending on whether or not humankind exists. You speak to us, Monsieur le Chevalier, of a certain quantity of water precisely due to each

country over the course of a year. As I have never concerned myself with meteorology, I do not know what has been said on this subject, although, to tell you the truth, the experiment seems impossible to me, at least with even approximate certainty. In any case, this can only refer to a single year: how far apart, then, shall we place the two ends of the period? They may be ten years apart, perhaps a hundred. But I want to give these reasoners a run for their money. I admit that, in each year, precisely the same amount of rain must fall in each country: that will be the invariable law; but the distribution of this rain will be, if I may put it that way, the *flexible part* of the law. Thus you see that with your *invariable laws we may very well still have floods and droughts; general* rainfall for the world, and *exceptional* rainfall for those who knew how to ask for it. We will therefore not pray that the olive tree grows in Siberia and the *klukwa* in Provence, but we will pray that the olive tree does not freeze in the countryside around Aix, as happened in 1709, and that the *klukwa.* Don't get too hot during your brief summer. All the philosophers of our century speak only of immutable laws; I believe it: for them, it is simply a matter of preventing man from praying, and this is the infallible way to achieve it. Hence the anger of these unbelievers when preachers or moralistic writers have taken it upon themselves to tell us that the material scourges of this world, such as volcanoes, earthquakes, etc., are divine punishments. They maintain that it was absolutely necessary that Lisbon be destroyed on November 1, [1755]; just as it was necessary that the sun rise that very day: a fine theory indeed, and quite suited to perfecting man. I remember being indignant one day upon reading the sermon that *Herder* addresses somewhere to *Voltaire*, concerning his poem on this Lisbon disaster:

"You dare," he said to him seriously, "to complain to Providence about the destruction of this city: you must be joking! It is a blatant blasphemy against *eternal wisdom*. Do you not know that man, as well as his beams and tiles, is *indebted to nothingness*, and that everything that exists must pay its debt? Elements come together, elements come apart; *it is a necessary law of nature*: what is so astonishing about that, or what could possibly justify a complaint?"

Isn't that, gentlemen, a fine consolation, and quite worthy of the honest actor who taught the Gospel from the pulpit and pantheism in his writings? But philosophy knows no more. From Epictetus to the *Bishop of Weimar*, and until the end of time, this will be its unchanging method and *its necessary law*. It knows nothing of the oil of consolation. It dries up, it hardens the heart, and when it has hardened a man, it believes it has made a sage. Voltaire, moreover, had already answered his critic in this very poem on the Lisbon disaster:

> No, don't present any more to my troubled heart
>
> These immutable laws of necessity,
>
> This chain of bodies, minds, and worlds:
>
> O dreams of scholars, O profound chimeras!
>
> God holds the chain in his hand and is not chained:
>
> Everything is determined by his benevolent choice;
>
> He is free, he is just, he is not implacable.

Up to this point, it would be impossible to say anything better; but as if he regretted having spoken rationally, he immediately added:

> Why then should we suffer under a just master!
>
> That was the fatal knot that needed to be untied.

Here begin the audacious questions: *Why then do we suffer under a just master?* Catechism and common sense answer in unison: BECAUSE WE DESERVE IT. *Therein lies the fatal knot wisely untied*, and one will never deviate from this solution without being unreasonable. In vain will Voltaire himself exclaim:

What will you say upon seeing this mass of victims?

God has taken revenge; their death is the price of their crimes.

What crime, what wrong have these children committed?

Crushed and bloody on the mother's breast?

Faulty reasoning! Lack of attention and analysis. No doubt there were children in *Lisbon*, just as there were in *Herculaneum* in the year 79 AD; just as there were in Lyon some time before, or, if you prefer, at the time of the Flood. When God punishes any society for the crimes it has committed, He administers justice as we ourselves do in such cases, without anyone thinking to complain. A city revolts: it massacres the sovereign's representatives; it closes its gates to him; it defends itself against him; it is captured. The prince has it dismantled and strips it of all its privileges; no one will condemn this judgment on the pretext of the innocent people imprisoned within the city. Let us never address two issues at once. *The city was punished because of its crime, and without this crime, it would not have suffered*. That is a true proposition, independent of any other. You might then ask me *why the innocent were subjected to the same punishment*? That is another question to which I am under no obligation to answer. I could admit that I understand nothing about it, without altering the obviousness of the first proposition. I could also answer that the sovereign is unable to act otherwise, and I would have no shortage of good reasons to demonstrate this.

THE KNIGHT

Let me ask you: who would prevent this good king from taking under his protection the inhabitants of this city who remained faithful, from transporting them to some happier province, to make them enjoy there, I do not say the same privileges, but even greater privileges, more worthy of their loyalty?

THE COUNT

This is precisely what God does when innocent people perish in a general catastrophe: but let's return. I flatter myself that Voltaire felt no more sincere pity than I did for those unfortunate *children crushed and bleeding at their mother's breast*; but it is madness to cite them to contradict the preacher who cries out: " *God has taken revenge; these evils are the price of our crimes";* for nothing is truer in general. It is simply a matter of explaining why the innocent are caught up in the punishment meted out against the guilty, but as I told you just now, this is only an objection; and if we force truths to bend to difficulties, there is no longer any philosophy. I doubt, moreover, that Voltaire, who wrote so quickly, was aware that instead of addressing a particular question, relative to the event he was discussing on this occasion, he was addressing a general one. And that he was asking, without realizing it, *why children, who have yet neither earned nor failed, are subject throughout the universe to the same ills that can afflict grown men*? For if it is decided that a certain number of children must perish, I do not see how it matters to them to die in one way rather than another. Whether a dagger pierces a man's heart, or a little blood collects in his brain, he falls dead equally; but in the first case, it is said that he ended his days *by a violent death*. For God, however, there is no violent death. A steel blade placed in the heart is a disease, like a simple callus that we would call *a polyp*.

We would therefore have to rise even higher and ask *by what cause it has become necessary that a multitude of children die before birth; that half of those born die before the age of two; and that still others, in very great numbers, die before the age of reason*. All these questions, posed in a spirit of pride and contention, are quite worthy of *Mathieu Garo*; but if they are proposed with respectful curiosity, they can exercise our minds without danger. Plato addressed this; for I recall that, in his Republic, he brings onto the scene, I know not how, a certain Levantine (Armenian, if I am not mistaken), who recounts many things about the torments of the afterlife, eternal or temporary; for he distinguishes them very precisely. But with regard to children who died before the age of reason, Plato says that *concerning their state in the other life, this stranger was relating things that should not be repeated*.

Why are these children born, or why do they die? What will happen to them one day? These are mysteries perhaps beyond comprehension; but one must have lost one's sense to argue from what is incomprehensible against

what is perfectly understandable.

Would you like to hear another sophism on the same subject? Voltaire will provide it again; and still in the same work:

> Lisbon, which is no more, did it have more vices?
>
> London and Paris, immersed in delights?
>
> Lisbon is damaged and they're dancing in Paris.

Good God! Did this man want the Almighty to turn the ground of all the great cities into execution grounds? Or did he want God never to punish, because he does not always punish, and everywhere at the same time?

Had Voltaire then received the divine scales to weigh the crimes of kings and individuals, and to assign punctually the time of torture? And what would this reckless man have said if, at the moment he was writing these insane lines, in the middle of the city *plunged in delights*, he could have suddenly seen, in such a near future, the Committee of Public Safety, the Revolutionary Tribunal and the long pages of the *Moniteur* all red with human blood?

Moreover, pity is undoubtedly one of the noblest sentiments that honor humankind, and we must be careful not to extinguish it, not even to weaken it in our hearts; however, when dealing with philosophical subjects, we must carefully avoid all forms of poetry and see in things only the things themselves. Voltaire, for example, in the poem I quote, shows us *one hundred thousand unfortunate souls being devoured by the earth*: but first of all, why *one hundred thousand*? He is all the more mistaken since he could have told the truth without breaking the measure, as only about twenty thousand men perished in this horrible catastrophe; far fewer, therefore, than in a considerable number of battles that I could name for you. Furthermore, we must consider that, in these great misfortunes, a multitude of circumstances are merely for show. That an unfortunate child, for example, *is crushed under a stone* is a dreadful sight for us; But for him, he is much happier than if he had died of confluent smallpox or a painful toothache. Whether three or four thousand men perish scattered over a large area, or all at once and in a single blow, by an earthquake or a flood, is undoubtedly the same thing for reason; but for the imagination the difference is enormous: so that it may very well be that one of these terrible events, which we rank among the greatest scourges of the universe, is nothing in fact, I do not say for humanity in general, but for a single region. You can see here a new example of these laws, both flexible and invariable, which govern the universe: let us consider, if you will, as a fixed point that, at a given time, so many men must die in such and such a country: that is invariable; But the distribution of life among individuals, as well as the place and time of death, constitute what I have called the flexible part of the law; so that an entire city can be ruined without an increase in mortality. The plague may even be doubly just, because of the guilty who were punished and the innocent who, in compensation, gained a longer and happier life. The all-powerful wisdom that governs everything has such numerous, diverse, and admirable means that the part accessible to our eyes should teach us to revere the other. Many years ago, I became aware of certain death tables compiled in a very small province with all possible care and every means of accuracy. I was quite surprised to learn, from the results of these tables, that two furious epidemics of smallpox had not increased mortality in the years when that disease raged. So true is it that this hidden force we call *nature* has compensatory mechanisms that are hardly suspected.

THE SENATOR

A sacred adage says that *pride is the beginning of all our crimes*; I think one could very well add: *And of all our errors*. It is pride that leads us astray by inspiring in us an unfortunate spirit of contention that makes us seek out difficulties for the pleasure of arguing, instead of submitting them to proven principles; but I am greatly mistaken if the debaters themselves do not inwardly feel that it is entirely futile. How many disputes would end if every person were forced to say what they think!

THE COUNT

I believe it just as you do; but before going any further, allow me to point out a particular characteristic of Christianity that presents itself to me in connection with these calamities we are discussing. If Christianity were human, its teachings would vary with human opinions; but since it originates from the immutable Being, it is immutable like Him. Certainly, this religion, which is the mother of all good and true science that exists in the world, and whose greatest interest is the advancement of that very science, is careful not to forbid it or hinder its progress. It greatly approves, for example, of our investigating the nature of all the physical agents that play a role in the great upheavals of nature. As for Christianity, which is in direct contact with the sovereign, it hardly concerns itself with the ministers who carry out his orders. It knows that it is made for prayer and not for discourse, since it certainly knows all that it needs to know. Whether one approves of it or blames it, admires it or ridicules it, it remains impassive; and on the ruins of a city overturned by an earthquake, it cries out in the 18th century, as it would have done in the 12th:

We beseech you, Lord, deign to protect us; strengthen by your supreme grace this earth shaken by our iniquities, so that the hearts of all men may know that it is your wrath that sends us these punishments, just as it is your mercy that delivers us from them.

There are no immutable laws here, as you see; now it is up to the legislator to know, even setting aside any discussion about the truth of beliefs, whether a nation as a whole gains more from being imbued with these sentiments than from engaging exclusively in the search for physical causes, to which, nevertheless, I am far from denying a very great merit of the second order.

THE SENATOR

I strongly approve of your Church, which claims to teach everyone, allowing itself to be taught by no one; and it must undoubtedly possess great self-confidence, so that public opinion has absolutely no power over it. As a Latin...

THE COUNT

What do you call *Latin*? Please know that in matters of religion, I am Greek just like you.

THE SENATOR

Come now, my good friend, let's postpone the joke, if you don't mind.

THE COUNT

I am not joking at all, I assure you: was not the Apostles' Creed written in Greek before it was written in Latin? Do not the *Greek* creeds of Nicea and Constantinople, and that of Saint Athanasius, contain my faith? And should I not die to defend its truth? I hope that I belong to the religion of Saint Paul and Saint Luke, who were *Greek*. I belong to the religion of Saint Ignatius, Saint Justin, Saint Athanasius, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Cyril, Saint Basil, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Saint Epiphanius, of all the saints, in short, who are on your altars and whose names you bear, and especially of Saint Chrysostom, whose liturgy you have retained. I accept all that these great and holy figures accepted; I regret all that they regretted; Furthermore, I accept as gospel all the ecumenical councils convened in *Asia Minor* or *European Greece*. I ask you, is it possible to be more Greek?

THE SENATOR

What you're saying gives me an idea that I believe is correct. If there were ever a question of a peace treaty between us, we could propose the *status quo ante bellum*.

THE COUNT

And I would sign on the spot, even without instructions, *sub spe rati*. But what did you mean by that, in my capacity as a *Latin*?

THE SENATOR

I meant to say that, as a *Latin*, you always come back to authority. I often find it amusing to see you sleeping on that pillow. Besides, even if I were a Protestant, we wouldn't be arguing today: for it is, in my opinion, perfectly sound, perfectly just, and even, if you will, perfectly philosophically sound to establish as a national dogma *that every plague from heaven is a punishment*: and what human society hasn't believed that? What nation, ancient or modern, civilized or barbaric, and in every possible system of religion, hasn't regarded these calamities as the work of a superior power that could be appeased? I do, however, commend Monsieur le Chevalier greatly if he never mocked his parish priest when he heard him recommend the payment of the tithe *under threat of hail or lightning*: for no one has the right to assert that such misfortune is the consequence of such a fault (especially a minor one); but one can and should assert, in general, that all physical harm is a punishment; and that, therefore, those we call the *plagues of heaven* are necessarily the consequence of a great national crime, or of the accumulation of individual crimes; so that each of these plagues could have been prevented, first by a better life, and then by prayer. Thus, we will leave the sophists to their *eternal and immutable laws*, which exist only in their imagination, and which aim at nothing less than the extinction of all morality and the absolute brutalization of the human race. "We need electricity," you said, Sir; "therefore we need thunder and lightning, just as we need dew; you might add: just as we need wolves, tigers, rattlesnakes, etc., etc." – I truly don't know. Since humanity is in such a visible and deplorable state of decay, I don't know enough to decide which beings and which phenomena are solely due to this condition. Besides, even in our own country, we manage perfectly well without wolves in England: why, I ask you, shouldn't we manage without them elsewhere? I don't know at all whether it's necessary for the tiger to be what it is; I don't even know if it's necessary for there to be tigers at all, or, to speak frankly to you, I'm quite sure of the contrary. Who can forget man's sublime prerogative: *that wherever he is established in sufficient numbers, the animals that surround him must serve him, amuse him, or disappear*? But let us start, if you will, from the foolish hypothesis of optimism: let us suppose that the tiger must exist, and moreover be what it is, shall we say: *Therefore, it is quite necessary that one of these animals enters such a dwelling today, and that it devours ten people?* The earth must contain within itself various substances which, under certain circumstances, can ignite or vaporize and produce an earthquake: very well; we might add: *Therefore, it was necessary that, on November 1, 1755, all of Lisbon should perish in one of these catastrophes. The explosion could not have occurred elsewhere, in a desert, for example, or beneath the sea, or a hundred paces from the city. Could the inhabitants not have been warned, by slight preliminary tremors, to take shelter by fleeing?* Any unsophisticated human reason will revolt against such consequences.

THE COUNT

Undoubtedly, and I believe that universal common sense is unquestionably right when it adheres to the etymology of which it is the author. Plagues *are* destined to *strike* us; and we are *struck* because we deserve it. We could undoubtedly have failed to deserve it, and even after having deserved it, we can obtain mercy. This, it seems to me, is the result of all that can be said sensibly on this point; and it is yet another of the rather numerous cases where philosophy, after long and arduous detours, finally finds respite in universal belief. You therefore understand well enough, Monsieur le Chevalier, how contrary I am to your comparison *of nights and days*. The course of the stars is not an evil: on the contrary, it is a constant rule and a good that belongs to all humankind; but evil, which is merely a punishment, how could it be necessary? Innocence could have prevented it; Prayer can ward it off: I will always return to this great principle. Note in this regard a strange sophism of impiety, or, if you prefer, of ignorance; for I would gladly see the latter in place of the former. Because all-powerful goodness knows how to employ one evil to exterminate another, people believe that evil is an integral part of the whole. Let us recall what wise antiquity said: *that Mercury* (who is reason) *has the power to tear out Typhon's sinews to make the strings of the divine lyre*. But if *Typhon* did not exist, this marvelous feat would be useless. Since our prayers are therefore merely an effort of the intelligent being against the action of *Typhon*, their usefulness, and even their necessity, are philosophically demonstrated.

THE SENATOR

This word, *Typhon*, which in antiquity was the emblem of all evil, and especially of all temporal scourge, reminds me of an idea that has often occupied my mind and which I wish to share with you. Today, however, I will spare you my metaphysics, for I must leave you to go and see the grand fireworks display being set off this evening on the road to Péterhoff, which is meant to represent an eruption of Vesuvius. It is a *Typhonian* spectacle, as you can see, but entirely innocent.

THE COUNT

I wouldn't want to be held responsible for the midges and the many birds that nest in the nearby hedgerows, not even for some daredevil of the human species, who might very well lose their life or a few limbs there, all while saying *"Niebosse"* (*don't be afraid*)! I don't know how it is that people never gather together without putting themselves at risk. Go on, however, my dear friend, and be sure to come back tomorrow, your head full of *volcanic* ideas.

END OF THE FOURTH INTERVIEW

FIFTH INTERVIEW

THE KNIGHT

How did you have fun yesterday, Senator?

THE SENATOR

Many, indeed, and as much as one can possibly enjoy such spectacles. The fireworks were superb, and no one perished, at least no one of our kind. As for the *gnats* and *birds*, I can vouch for them no better than our friend; but I thought of them a great deal during the display, and it was this *thought* that I reserved for myself yesterday before sharing it with you. The more I reflected on it, the more I became convinced that the spectacles of nature are very likely to us what human actions are to the animals that witness them. No living being can possess any knowledge other than that which constitutes its essence, and which is exclusively relative to the place it occupies in the universe. And this, in my opinion, is one of the many irrefutable proofs of innate ideas: for if there were no ideas of this kind for every knowing being, each of them, deriving their ideas from the chances of experience, could step outside their sphere and disrupt the universe; but this will never happen. The dog, the monkey, the *half-reasoning* elephant, for example, will approach the fire and warm themselves with pleasure, just as we do; but you will never teach them to push a burning ember over the coals, for fire does not belong to them; otherwise, the domain of humankind would be destroyed. They will certainly see *one*, but never unity; the elements of number, but never *number itself*; a triangle, two triangles, a thousand triangles, together or one after the other, but never *triangulation*.

The perpetual union of certain ideas in our understanding causes us to confuse them, even though they are essentially separate. Your two eyes are reflected in mine: I have the perception that I immediately associate with the idea of *duality*; in fact, however, these two forms of knowledge are of a completely different order, and one in no way leads to the other. I will tell you more, since I am on the subject: I will never understand the morality of intelligent beings, nor even human unity, or any other *cognitive* unity whatsoever, separate from innate ideas; but let us return to animals. My dog accompanies me to some public spectacle, an execution, for example: certainly, he sees everything I see: the crowd, the somber procession, the officers of justice, the armed forces, the scaffold, the condemned, the executioner, everything in a word; but what does he understand of all this? What he must understand, *in his capacity as a dog*, is this: he will be able to distinguish me from the crowd and find me again if some accident separates us; he will position himself so as not to be crippled under the feet of the spectators; when the executioner raises his arms, the animal, if he is near, may move away for fear that the blow will be meant for him; if he sees blood, he may tremble, but only as at the slaughterhouse. There his knowledge ends, and all the

efforts of his intelligent teachers, employed tirelessly throughout the ages, would never carry him beyond this point; the ideas of morality, sovereignty, crime, justice, public force, etc., attached to this sad spectacle, are meaningless to him. All the signs of these ideas surround him, touch him, press upon him, so to speak, but to no avail; for no sign can exist unless the idea pre-exists. It is one of the most evident laws of Providence's temporal government that every active being exerts its influence within the circle laid out for it, without ever being able to step outside of it. Indeed, how could common sense even imagine the contrary? Starting from these undeniable principles, who would tell you that a volcano, a waterspout, an earthquake, etc., are not for me precisely what execution is for my dog? I understand from these phenomena what I am meant to understand, that is to say, everything that relates to my innate ideas that constitute my human condition. The rest is irrelevant.

THE COUNT

There is nothing so plausible as your idea, my dear friend, or, to put it better, I see nothing so evident, in the way you have considered the matter: yet what a difference from another point of view! *Your dog doesn't know that he doesn't know*, and you, an intelligent man, do. What a sublime privilege this doubt is! Follow this line of thought, and you will be delighted. But by the way, since you have touched on this subject, do you know that I believe I can give you real pleasure by showing you how bad faith has extricated itself from the invincible argument that animals provide in favor of innate ideas? You have perfectly well seen that the identity and invariable permanence of each class of sentient or intelligent beings necessarily presuppose innate ideas; and you have quite aptly cited the animals that will eternally see what we see, without ever being able to understand what we understand. But before I get to a particularly amusing quote, I must ask you if you have ever considered that these same animals provide another direct and decisive argument in favor of this system? Indeed, since the ideas that constitute an animal, each in its species, are literally *innate*, that is to say, absolutely independent of experience; since the hen that has never seen a sparrowhawk nevertheless displays all the signs of terror the moment it appears to her for the first time, like a black dot in the cloud; since she immediately calls to her chicks with an extraordinary cry she has never uttered before; since the chicks that hatch from the shell rush at once under their mother's wings; finally, since this observation is invariably repeated in all species of animals, why should experience be any more necessary to man for all the fundamental ideas that make him human? The objection is not trivial, as you can see. Now listen to how the two heroes of *Aesthetics* got out of it.

Coste, Locke's French translator, who was apparently a sensible, good, and modest man, told us in some footnote to his translation that he once raised this very objection to Locke, which is quite obvious. The philosopher, feeling personally attacked, became somewhat angry and replied abruptly: " *I did not write my book to explain the actions of animals*." Coste, who had every right to exclaim, like the Greek philosopher, " *Jupiter, you are angry, so you are wrong!"* contented himself, however, with telling us in a pleasantly serious tone: " *The answer was very good; the title of the book clearly demonstrates it*. Indeed, it is not written *about the understanding of animals*." You see, gentlemen, what Locke was reduced to in order to extricate himself from this predicament. He was careful, moreover, not to raise the objection in his book, for he did not want to expose himself to a reply; but Condillac, who was not troubled by his conscience, went about extricating himself from the situation quite differently. I do not believe that the blind obstinacy of a pride that refuses to back down has ever produced anything so amusing. *The beast will flee*, he says, *because it has seen others devoured*; but since there was no way to generalize this explanation, he adds: "that with regard to animals that have never seen their own kind devoured, one can *reasonably* believe that their mothers, from the very beginning, will have *urged* them to flee." *Urged* is perfect! I am annoyed, however, that he did not say, " *will have advised them*." To conclude this rare explanation, he adds, with the utmost seriousness, *that if it is rejected, he does not see what could cause the animal to flee*.

Excellent! In a moment we will see that if we refuse these wonderful arguments, it may very well happen that the animal stops fleeing from its enemy, because Condillac *does not see* why this animal should flee.

Moreover, however he expresses himself, I can never agree with him. *He doesn't see*, he says: with his permission, I believe he *sees* perfectly well, but prefers to lie rather than admit it.

THE SENATOR

A thousand thanks, my dear friend, for your philosophical anecdote, which I find indeed extremely amusing. You are therefore in complete agreement with me on my view of animals, and on the conclusion I have drawn regarding ourselves. They are, as I was saying just now, *surrounded*, *touched*, and *pressed* by all the signs of intelligence, without ever being able to rise to the slightest of its actions: refine as much as you please with thought this soul, this unknown principle, this *instinct*, this inner light that has been given to them with such a prodigious variety of direction and intensity, you will never find anything but an *asymptote* of reason, which you can approach as much as you like, but without ever touching it; otherwise, a province of creation could be invaded, which is obviously impossible.

For a very similar reason, there is no doubt that we ourselves cannot be *surrounded*, *affected*, and *pressed* by actions and agents of a higher order, of which we have no knowledge other than that which relates to our present situation. I know the true value of the sublime doubt you just mentioned: yes, *I know that I do not know*, perhaps I even know something more; but it remains true that, by virtue of our very intelligence, it will never be possible for us to attain direct knowledge on this point. Moreover, I make extensive use of this doubt in all my investigations into *causes*. I have read countless jokes about the ignorance of the ancients *who saw spirits everywhere*: it seems to me that we are much more foolish, we who see them nowhere. We are constantly told about *physical causes*. What is a physical cause?

THE COUNT

It is a *natural cause*, if we wish to limit ourselves to translating the word; but, in the modern sense, it is *a material cause*, that is to say, a cause that is not a cause: for *matter* and *cause* are mutually exclusive, like *white* and *black*, *circle* and *square*. Matter only acts through movement: now, since all movement is an effect, it follows that a *physical cause*, if we want to express ourselves precisely, is NONSENSE and even a contradiction in terms. There are therefore no, and there cannot be, any properly physical *causes*, because there is no, and there cannot be, movement without a prime mover, and every prime mover is immaterial; *everywhere, that which moves precedes that which is moved, that which leads precedes that which is led, that which commands precedes that which is commanded*: matter can do nothing, and indeed it is nothing but the proof of the mind. One hundred marbles placed in a straight line, each receiving successively imparted motion from the first, do they not presuppose a hand that struck the first blow by virtue of a will? And even if the arrangement of things prevented me from seeing this hand, would it be any less visible to my understanding? Is not the soul of a clockmaker contained within the drum of this clock, where the mainspring is charged, so to speak, with the instructions of an intelligence? I hear Lucretius telling me: " *To touch, to be touched, belongs only to bodies* "; but what do we care for these meaningless words beneath a sententious apparatus that frightens children? They essentially mean that *no body can be touched without being touched*. A fine discovery, as you see! The question is whether there are only bodies in the universe, and whether bodies cannot be moved by substances of another order. Now, not only can they be so, but originally they could not have been otherwise: for since every collision can only be conceived as the result of another, one must necessarily admit an infinite series of collisions, that is to say, of effects without a cause, or agree that the principle of motion cannot be found in matter; and we carry within ourselves the proof that motion begins with an act of will. Nothing prevents us, moreover, from legitimately calling causes, in a common and indispensable sense, those effects that produce others; thus, in the sequence of marbles I mentioned earlier, all the forces are *causes*, except the last, just as all are *effects,* except for the first one. But if we want to express ourselves with philosophical precision, that's another matter. It cannot be repeated too often that the ideas of *matter* and *cause* are strictly mutually exclusive.

Bacon had formed a fanciful idea about the forces at work in the universe, an idea that led astray countless other scholars: he first assumed these forces to be material; then he endlessly superimposed them one upon another; and I often couldn't help but suspect that, seeing in court those family trees where everyone is a son except the firstborn, and where everyone is a father except the last, he had fashioned for himself a *kind of hierarchical structure*, and that he would arrange causes in his mind in the same way; understanding, in his own way, that such a cause was the daughter of the one preceding it, and that the generations, ever closer together as they ascended, would finally lead the true interpreter of nature back to a common ancestor. These were the ideas that this great legal scholar formed about nature and the science that is supposed to explain it: but nothing could be more fanciful. I don't want to drag you into a long discussion. For you and me, a single observation is enough for now. It's that Bacon and his followers have never been able to cite, and never will cite, a single example to support their

theory. Let them show us this supposed order of *general*, *more general*, or *most general* causes, as they like to call it. Much has been discussed and much discovered since Bacon: let them give us an example of this marvelous genealogy, let them point out a single mystery of nature that has been explained—I won't say by a cause, but only by a previously unknown primary effect, and by proceeding from one to the other. Imagine the most commonplace phenomenon, elasticity, for example, or any other you choose. Now, I'm not being demanding; I'm not asking for the ancestors or great-great-grandmothers of the phenomenon; I'm content with its mother; alas! Everyone remains silent; and it is still (I mean in the material order) *proles sine matre creata*. Ah! How can one be so blind as to seek causes in *nature?* When is nature itself an effect? As long as we remain within the material realm, no one can advance further than another in the search for causes. All are held back, and must remain so, at the very first step. The genius of discoveries in the natural sciences consists solely in discovering unknown facts or relating unexplained phenomena to primary effects already known, and which we take as causes; thus, he who discovered the circulation of blood, and he who discovered the sex of plants, undoubtedly both earned the gratitude of science; but the discovery of facts has nothing in common with that of causes. Newton, for his part, immortalized himself by attributing to gravity phenomena that no one had ever thought to attribute to it; but the great man's lackey knew as much about the cause of gravity as his master. Some disciples, of whom he would be ashamed if he returned to this world, dared to say that attraction was a *mechanical* law. Newton never uttered such blasphemy against common sense, and it was quite in vain that they sought to find such a famous accomplice. On the contrary, he said (and this is certainly already a great deal) *that he would leave to his readers the question of whether the agent that produces gravity is material or immaterial*. Please read his theological letters to Dr. Bentley: you will be equally instructed and edified.

You see, Senator, that I greatly approve of your way of viewing this world, and that I even support it, if I am not entirely mistaken, with quite sound arguments. Moreover, I repeat, *I know that I do not know*; and this doubt fills me with both joy and gratitude, since I find in it both the indelible mark of my greatness and the salutary safeguard against all ridiculous or rash speculation. Examining nature from this perspective, on a grand scale, as in its latest creation, I continually recall (and this is enough for me) the remark of a Spartan pondering what prevented a stiff corpse from standing upright no matter how one tried: " By God," he said, " *there must be something in there*." Always and everywhere one must say the same: for, without *something*, everything is a corpse, and nothing stands upright. The world, thus conceived as a mere assemblage of appearances, in which the slightest phenomenon conceals a reality, is a true and wise idealism. In a very true sense, I can say that material objects are nothing of what I see; but what I see is real in relation to me, and it is enough for me to be led to the existence of another order which I firmly believe in without seeing it. Based on these principles, I understand perfectly not only that prayer is generally useful for warding off physical illness, but that it is its true antidote, its natural remedy, and that by its very nature it tends to destroy it, just as that invisible power which comes to us from Peru, hidden in a light bark, seeks out, by virtue of its own essence, the principle of fever, touches it, and attacks it with more or less success, according to circumstances and temperament; unless one wishes to maintain that wood cures fever, which would be quite ludicrous.

THE KNIGHT

Funny as long as you like; but apparently I must be a *funny body*, because, in my life, I have had no scruples about this proposal.

THE COUNT

But if wood cures fever, why bother going to Peru to get it? Let's go down to the garden: these birch trees will provide us with plenty for all the tertian fevers in Russia!

THE KNIGHT

Let's be serious, please: this is not about wood in general, but about a *certain type of wood* whose particular quality is to cure fever.

THE COUNT

Very well, but what do you mean by *quality*? Does this word express in your mind a simple accident, and do you believe, for example, that quinine cures because it is *figurative*, *heavy*, *colored*, etc.

THE KNIGHT

You are quibbling, my dear friend; it goes without saying that I am talking about a real quality.

THE COUNT

What, *real quality*?! What does that mean, please?

THE KNIGHT

Oh! I beg you, in turn, let us not argue over words: do you know that military common sense is offended by these kinds of quibbles?

THE COUNT

I value military common sense more than you may think; and I protest to you that *quibbling* is no less odious to me than to you; but I do not believe that one argues about words by asking what they mean.

THE KNIGHT

By *real quality* I therefore mean something that actually subsists, *a certain something* that I am not obliged to define apparently, but which ultimately exists like everything else that exists.

THE COUNT

Wonderful, but this *something*, this *unknown* whose value we seek, is it matter or not? If it isn't matter...

THE KNIGHT

Ah! I'm not saying that!

THE COUNT

But if it is matter, certainly you can no longer call it *a quality*; it is no longer an *accident*, a *modification*, a *mode*, or whatever you like to call it; it is a substance similar in its essence to any other material substance, and this substance, which is not *wood* (otherwise all wood would be cured), exists in wood, or rather, *in this wood*, just as sugar, which is neither water nor tea, is contained in this tea infusion that dissolves it. We have therefore only gone back to the beginning of the question, and it always starts again. Indeed, since any substance that cures fever is matter, I say again: why go to Peru? Matter is even easier to find than wood: it is everywhere, it seems to me, and everything we see is good for healing. Then you will be forced to repeat to me about matter in general everything you told me about wood. You will tell me: *It is not a question of matter taken generally, but of this particular matter, that is to say*, of matter, *in the most abstract sense, plus a quality which distinguishes it and which cures the fever*.

And I will attack you again, asking you what this quality is that you suppose to be material, and I will pursue you thus with the same advantage, without your good sense ever being able to find a point of support to resist me; for matter being by its nature inert and passive, and having action only by the movement that it cannot give itself, it follows that it can only act by the action of an agent more or less distant, veiled by it, and which cannot be *itself*.

You see, my dear knight, it's not entirely a question of words; but let's return. This foray into causes leads us to an equally sound and fruitful idea: that of considering prayer in its effect, simply as a secondary cause; for from this point of view, it is only that, and should not be distinguished from any other. If, therefore, a fashionable philosopher is surprised to see me use prayer to protect myself from lightning, for example, I will say to him: " *And you, sir, why do you use lightning rods?* Or, to stick to something more common, *why do you use pumps in fires, and remedies in illnesses? Are you not thus, just as I am, opposing the eternal laws?* " "Oh! That's quite different," I will be told; "for if it is a law, for example, that fire burns, it is also a law that water extinguishes fire." "And I will answer: *That is precisely what I say; for if it is a law that lightning produces such and such devastation, it is also a law that prayer, offered in time upon the* FIRE OF HEAVEN, *extinguishes or diverts it*. And be assured, gentlemen, that no objection will be raised to me in the same supposition, which I do not retort with advantage: there is no middle ground between rigid, absolute, universal fatalism, and the common faith of men in the efficacy of prayer."

Do you remember, Sir Knight, that handsome biped who, not long ago, was mocking us with these two lines from Boileau?

For me, even in the realm of health, another world is astonishing.

Who believes the soul is immortal and that it is God who thunders.

"In Boileau's time," he said, addressing young girls and youths astonished by such knowledge, "it was not yet known that a lightning strike is merely a reinforced electrical spark; and it would have been a serious matter had thunder not been regarded as a divine weapon intended to punish crimes. However, you should know that even in ancient times, certain reasoners somewhat perplexed the believers of their era by asking them why Jupiter amused himself by striking the rocks of the Caucasus or the uninhabited forests of Germania with lightning."

I myself somewhat embarrassed this profound thinker by saying to him, "But you don't realize, sir, that you yourself are providing an excellent argument for the devout of our time (for there are always some, despite the efforts of the wise) to continue thinking like good old Boileau; indeed, they will simply tell you: ' *Thunder, although it kills, is not designed to kill; and we precisely ask God that He deign, in His goodness, to send His thunderbolts upon the rocks and the deserts, which is undoubtedly sufficient for the fulfillment of the laws of physics.* ' I did not wish, as you can well imagine, to defend a thesis before such an audience; but see, I beg you, where misunderstood science has led us, and what we can expect from a youth imbued with such principles. What profound ignorance, and even what horror of the truth!" Observe above all this fundamental sophism of modern pride, which always confuses the discovery or generation of an effect with the revelation of a cause. People recognize in an unknown substance (amber) the property it acquires, through friction, of attracting light objects. They name this quality amberity (electricity). They do not change this name as they discover other idioelectric substances: soon, new observations reveal to them electric fire. They learn to accumulate it, to conduct it, and so on. Finally, they believe themselves certain of having recognized and demonstrated the identity of this fire with lightning, so that if names were imposed by reasoning, we would have to substitute the word " *ceramics"* for " *electricity* " today, following received ideas. In all this, what have they done? They have magnified the miracle, they have, so to speak, brought it closer to themselves: but what more do they know about its essence? Nothing. It even seems that it became more inexplicable the more closely it was examined. Now, admire the beauty of this reasoning: "It is proven that electricity, as we observe it in our studies, differs only slightly from that terrible and mysterious agent called *lightning*, THEREFORE it is not God who thunders." Molière would say: *Your* Ergo *is nothing but a fool!* But we would be blessed if he were only a fool, consider the subsequent consequences: " *Therefore* it is not God who acts through secondary causes; *therefore* their course is invariable; *therefore* our fears and prayers are equally vain." What a series of monstrous errors! I was reading, not long ago, in a French newspaper, *that thunder is no longer, for an educated person, lightning bolt hurled from the heavens to make men tremble; that it is a very natural and very simple phenomenon that occurs a few fathoms above our heads and of which the nearest stars receive no news whatsoever*. Let us analyze this reasoning, and we will find: "That if lightning originated, for example, from the planet Saturn, *as it would then be closer to God*, there would be reason to believe that He would interfere; *but that, since it forms a few fathoms above our heads*, etc." We constantly speak of the crudeness of our ancestors: there is nothing so crude as the philosophy of our century; the common

sense of the twelfth century would rightly have mocked it. The Prophet-King certainly did not place the phenomenon I am speaking of in too high a region, since he calls it, with great oriental elegance, *the cry of the cloud*; He was even able to recommend himself to modern chemists by saying that *God knows how to extract water from lightning,* but he nevertheless said:

The voice of YOUR thunder bursts forth around us:

The earth trembled.

He reconciles religion and physics very well, as you see. It is we who are irrational. Ah! How dearly the natural sciences have cost humankind! It is entirely our own fault, for God had sufficiently protected us; but pride listened to the serpent, and once again humankind laid a criminal hand upon the tree of knowledge; we have lost ourselves, and unfortunately, we know nothing of it. Observe a fine law of Providence: since primitive times, which I am not discussing at this moment, it has given experimental physics only to Christians. The ancients certainly surpassed us in intellectual strength: this point is proven by the superiority of their languages in a way that seems to silence all the sophisms of our pride; for the same reason, they surpassed us in everything they had in common with us. On the contrary, their physics is practically nonexistent; For not only did they attach no value to physical experiments, but they despised them, and even attached to them some slight notion of impiety, and this confused sentiment came from a very high place. When all of Europe was Christian, when priests were the universal teachers, when all the institutions of Europe were Christianized, when theology had taken its place at the head of education, and when the other faculties had arranged themselves around it, like ladies-in-waiting around their sovereign, humankind being thus prepared, the natural sciences were given to it, * *tantæ molis erat romanam condere gentem**. Ignorance of this great truth has led very strong minds astray, without exception, Bacon, and indeed beginning with him.

THE SENATOR

Since you mention it, I must confess that I have found him extremely amusing more than once with his *desires*. He looks like a man stamping his feet next to a cradle, complaining that the child being rocked in it is not yet a mathematics professor or an army general.

THE COUNT

That is very well said, indeed, and I don't even know if it wouldn't be possible to quibble over the accuracy of your comparison; for the sciences, at the beginning of the 17th century, were by no means in their *infancy*. Not to mention the illustrious religious figure of his name, who preceded him by three centuries in England, and whose knowledge could still merit the title of *scholar* for men of our own century, Bacon was a contemporary of Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes, and Copernicus had preceded him; these four giants alone, not to mention a hundred other less famous figures, deprived him of the right to speak with such contempt of the state of the sciences, which already shone brilliantly in his time, and which were, in essence, all they could then be. The sciences do not develop as Bacon imagined: they germinate like everything that germinates; they grow like everything that grows; they are intertwined with the moral state of humankind. Although free and active, and consequently capable of pursuing and perfecting the sciences, like everything else within his reach, he is nevertheless left to his own devices in this respect perhaps less than in any other; but Bacon had the whim to insult the knowledge of his century, without ever having been able to appropriate it; and nothing is more curious in the history of the human mind than the imperturbable obstinacy with which this celebrated man continued to deny the existence of the light that shone around him, because his eyes were not formed in such a way as to receive it; for never was a man more estranged from the natural sciences and the laws of the world. Bacon has been very rightly accused of having delayed the progress of chemistry by trying to make it mechanistic, and I am delighted that this reproach was leveled at him in his own country by one of the foremost chemists of the century. He did even more harm by delaying the progress of this transcendent or *general* philosophy, about which he constantly spoke to us, without ever suspecting what it should be; he even invented words that are false and dangerous in the sense he gave them, such as "form," *for* example, which he substituted for " *nature"* or " *essence*," and whose crudeness has not failed to seize upon it, proposing as seriously as possible that we search for the *form* of heat, expansibility, etc.: and who

knows if one day, following in his footsteps, we will not be taught the *form of virtue* The force that drove Bacon was not yet fully mature when he wrote; yet already we see it fermenting in his writings, where it boldly sketches the seeds that we have seen sprout in our own time. Filled with a mechanical resentment (whose nature and source he himself did not know) against all spiritual ideas, Bacon focused all his attention on the material sciences, so as to disgust humanity with everything else. He relegated all metaphysics, all psychology, all natural theology to positive theology, and he locked the latter away in the Church with a prohibition against leaving; he relentlessly denounced final causes, which he called remoras *clinging* to the ship of science; and he dared to maintain outright that the search for these causes harmed true science: a gross and fatal error, and yet, could one believe it? A contagious error, even for the most well-disposed minds: so much so that one of the most fervent and esteemed disciples of the English philosopher did not feel his hand tremble when he warned us *to be very careful not to be seduced by what we perceive as order in the universe*. Bacon left nothing out to dissuade us from the philosophy of Plato, which is the human preface to the Gospel; and he praised, explained, and propagated that of Democritus, that is to say, corpuscular philosophy, a desperate effort of materialism pushed to its limits, which, feeling that matter escapes it and explains nothing, plunges into the infinitely small; seeking, so to speak, matter without matter, and always content even in the midst of absurdities, wherever it does not find understanding. In accordance with this philosophical system, Bacon urges people to seek the cause of natural phenomena in the configuration of their constituent atoms or molecules—the most false and egregious idea that has ever defiled human understanding. And this is why the ^{18th} century, which has never loved and praised humanity except for its flaws, made Bacon its god, while nevertheless refusing to acknowledge his goodness and even his excellence. It is a grave error to believe that he influenced the course of science; for all the true founders of science preceded him or were unaware of him. Bacon was a barometer that predicted fair weather; and because he predicted it, people believed he had actually brought it. Walpole, his contemporary, called him the *prophet of science* —that is all that can be granted him. I saw the design of a medal struck in his honor, the body of which is a rising sun, with the inscription: *Exortus uti æthereus sol.* Nothing could be more obviously false; I would sooner pass a dawn with the inscription: *Nuntia solis*; and even then, one might find some exaggeration in that; for when Bacon *got up*, it was at least ten o'clock in the morning. The immense fortune he has made in our time is due, as I told you just now, solely to his reprehensible aspects. Note that he was only translated into French at the end of this century, and by a man who naively declared to us *that, against his own experience alone, he had a hundred thousand reasons not to believe in God!*

THE KNIGHT

Are you not afraid, Count, of being stoned for such blasphemies against one of the *great gods* of our century?

THE COUNT

If my duty were to be stoned, I would have to be patient; but I doubt anyone would stone me here. Moreover, if it were a matter of writing and publishing what I am telling you, I would not hesitate for a moment; I would have little fear of storms, so convinced am I that a writer's true intentions are always perceived, and that everyone does them justice. I would therefore be believed, I am sure, if I protested that I consider myself inferior in talent and knowledge to most of the writers you have in mind at this moment, just as I surpass them in the truth of the doctrines I profess. I even take pleasure in confessing this first superiority, which provides me with the subject of a delightful meditation on the inestimable privilege of truth, and on the worthlessness of talents that dare to separate themselves from it. There is a fine book to be written, gentlemen, *on the harm done to all the works of genius, and even to the character of their authors, by the errors they have professed for the last three centuries*. What a subject it would be if it were treated properly! The work would be all the more useful if it were based entirely on facts, thus leaving little room for quibble. On this point, I can cite a striking example: Newton, who comes to mind at this moment as one of the most prominent figures in the realm of science. What did he lack to fully justify the beautiful passage from a poet of his nation, who called him *a pure intellect lent to humankind by Providence to explain its works*? He lacked the ability to rise above national prejudices; for certainly, if he had possessed one more truth in his mind, he would have written one less book. Let him be exalted as much as he likes, I subscribe to everything, provided he stays in his place; but if he descends from the high regions of his genius to speak to me *of*

the big head and the little horn, I owe him nothing more: there is in the whole circle of error, and there can be no names, no ranks, no differences, NEWTON is the equal of *Villiers*.

After this profession of faith, which I constantly repeat, I live in perfect peace with myself. I cannot accuse myself of anything, I assure you, for I know what I owe to genius, but I also know what I owe to truth. Besides, gentlemen, *the time has come*, and all idols must fall. Let us return, if you please.

Do you find the slightest difficulty in this idea, that prayer is a secondary cause, and that it is impossible to raise a single objection against it that you could not raise in the same way against medicine, for example? *This sick person must either die or not die; therefore, it is useless to pray for him*; and I say: *therefore, it is useless to administer remedies to him; therefore, there is no medicine*. Where is the difference, I ask you? We do not wish to consider that secondary causes combine with the superior action. *This sick person will either die or not die*: yes, undoubtedly, he will die *if he does not take remedies*, and he will not die *if he uses them*: this condition, if it is permissible to express it thus, *is part* of the eternal decree. God, undoubtedly, is the universal mover; but each being is moved according to the nature it has received from Him. Gentlemen, if you wished to bring that horse we see over there in the meadow to you, how would you do it? You would mount it, or lead it by the bridle, and the animal would obey you, *according to its nature*, even though it had all the strength necessary to resist you and even to kill you with a kick. If you wished to bring us the child we see playing in the garden, you would call him, or, since you don't know his name, you would make some sign to him; the most understandable thing for him would undoubtedly be to show him this biscuit, and the child would come, *according to his nature*. Finally, if you needed a book from my library, you would go and fetch it, and the book would follow your hand in a purely passive way, *according to its nature*. This is a fairly natural image of God's action on creatures. He moves angels, men, animals, inanimate matter, all beings, in short; But each *according to his nature*; and man, having been created free, is moved freely. This law is truly *the eternal law*, and it is in this that one must believe.

THE SENATOR

I believe it with all my heart, just as you do; however, it must be admitted that the harmony between divine action and our freedom, and the events that depend upon it, is one of those questions where human reason, even when perfectly convinced, still lacks the strength to rid itself of a certain doubt, akin to fear, which always assails it despite itself. It is an abyss into which it is best not to look.

THE COUNT

It is entirely within our power, my good friend, not to look at it; it is right there before us, and to fail to see it would be blind, which would be far worse than being afraid. Let us repeat rather that there is no philosophy without the art of disregarding objections, otherwise even mathematics would be shaken. I confess that when contemplating certain mysteries of the intellectual world, one's head spins a little. However, it is possible to regain one's composure entirely; and nature itself, when wisely questioned, leads us on the path of truth. A thousand times, no doubt, you have reflected on the combination of movements. Run, for example, from east to west while the earth rotates from west to east. What do you want to do, you who are running? You want, I suppose, to cover a verst on foot in eight minutes from east to west: you have done it; you have reached the goal; you are tired, covered in sweat; You will finally experience all the symptoms of fatigue, but what did this higher power want, this *prime mover* that carries you along with it? It wanted you, instead of advancing from east to west, to move backward through space with an inconceivable speed, and that is what happened. It did, therefore, as did you, what it wanted. Play shuttlecock on a speeding ship: is there anything in the motion that carries both you and the shuttlecock that hinders your action? You launch the shuttlecock from bow to stern with a speed equal to that of the ship (an assumption that may be perfectly true): the two players certainly do *whatever they want*; but the prime mover also did *what it wanted*. One of the two thought he was *launching* the shuttlecock, but he only stopped it; the other went to it instead of waiting for it, as he thought he would, and catching it on his racket.

You might say that, since you did not do everything you believed, you did not do everything you wanted? In that case, you would be overlooking the fact that the same objection can be raised against the higher power, which could be said to have wanted to take control of the steering wheel, yet remained motionless. The argument would therefore hold equally well against God. Since it has precisely as much force in establishing that divine power can

be hindered by human power as in establishing the opposite proposition, it follows that it is null in both cases, and that the two powers act together without harming each other.

We can derive great benefit from this combination of motive forces that can simultaneously animate the same body, regardless of their number or direction, and which all have such a powerful effect that the moving body will find itself, at the end of the single motion they have produced, precisely at the same point where it would have stopped if all had acted one after the other. The only difference between the two dynamics is that in the dynamics of bodies, the force that animates them never belongs to them, whereas in the dynamics of minds, wills, which are substantial actions, unite, intersect, or collide of their own accord, since they are nothing but actions. It can even happen that a created will cancels out, I do not say the *effort*, but the result of divine action; for in this sense, *God* himself has told us that God WILLS things that do not happen, because man DOES NOT WILL. Thus, human rights are immense, and the greatest misfortune for humanity is to be ignorant of them; but its true spiritual action is prayer, through which, by entering into communion with God, humanity exercises, so to speak, His all-powerful influence, since it determines it. Do you wish to know what this power is, and to measure it, so to speak? Consider what the will of man can do in the realm of evil; it can oppose God, as you have just seen: what then can this same will do when it acts with Him? Where are the limits of this power? Its nature is to have none. The energy of the human will vaguely strikes us in the social order, and we often say that humanity *can do whatever it wants;* but in the spiritual order, where the effects are not perceptible, ignorance on this point is all too widespread; and even in the realm of matter, we fail, by far, to make the necessary reflections. You could easily knock down, for example, one of those wild roses; but you cannot knock down an oak: why, I pray you? The earth is covered with headless men who will hasten to answer you: *Because your muscles are not strong enough*, thus mistaking, in the best of faith, the *limit* for the *means* of strength. Man's strength is limited by the nature of his physical organs, in such a way that he can only disturb the established order to a certain extent; for you can imagine what would happen in this world if man could, with his bare arm, overturn a building or uproot a forest. It is quite true that this same wisdom which created man capable of improvement also gave him dynamism, that is to say, the artificial means to increase his natural strength; But this gift is accompanied by yet another striking sign of infinite foresight: for, desiring that all possible growth should be proportionate, not to man's unlimited desires, which are immense and almost always disordered, but only to his wise desires, regulated by his needs, it has willed that each of his powers should necessarily be accompanied by an impediment that arises from it and grows with it, so that the power must necessarily destroy itself by the very effort it makes to increase itself. One cannot, for example, proportionally increase the difficulties that will ultimately render it useless; moreover, one can say that in general, and even in operations that do not pertain to mechanics properly speaking, man cannot increase his natural powers without proportionally employing more time, more space, and more materials, which first of all hinders him in an ever-increasing way and further prevents him from acting clandestinely, and this must be carefully noted. Thus, for example, any man can blow up a house with a mine; but the necessary preparations are such that the authorities will always have time to come and ask him what he is doing. Optical instruments present another striking example of the same law, since it is impossible to perfect one of the qualities whose combination constitutes the perfection of these instruments without weakening the other. A similar observation can be made about firearms. In short, there is no exception to a law whose suspension would destroy human society. Thus, on all sides, and in the order of nature as in that of art, the limits are set. You would not be able to bend the shrub I mentioned earlier if you pressed it with a reed; however, this would not be because you lacked strength, but because the reed lacked it; and this overly weak instrument is to the wild rose what the arm is to the oak. Will, by its very nature, could move mountains; but the muscles, nerves, and bones entrusted to it for material action bend to the oak as the reed bends to the wild rose. Therefore, remove in your mind the law that dictates that human will can only act materially and immediately upon the body it animates (a purely accidental law, relative to our state of ignorance and corruption). She will uproot an oak as easily as she lifts an arm. However one considers the will of man, one finds that his rights are immense. But as in the spiritual order, of which the material world is but an image and a kind of reflection, prayer is the *Let us be careful not to deprive ourselves of this dynamic* entrusted to man: that would be to want to substitute our arms for the capstan or the fire pump.

The philosophy of the last century, which will constitute in the eyes of posterity one of the most shameful epochs of the human mind, has neglected nothing to turn us away from prayer through the consideration *of eternal and immutable laws*. Its favorite, I would almost say *sole*, object was to detach man from God: and how could it achieve this more surely than by preventing him from praying? All this philosophy was, in fact, nothing but a veritable system of practical atheism; I have given a name to this strange affliction: I call it *theophobia*; look

closely, you will see it in all the philosophical books of the 18th century. They did not say frankly: *"There is no God*," an assertion that might have led to some physical inconveniences; but they said: " *God is not* there. He is not in your ideas: they come from the senses; he is not in our thoughts, which are only *transformed sensations*; he is not in the plagues that afflict you." These are physical phenomena, like others that are explained by known laws. He doesn't think of you, he hasn't done anything for you in particular; the world is made for the insect as for you; he doesn't take revenge on you because you are too small, etc." Finally, one could not mention God to this philosophy without throwing it into convulsions. Even writers of that era, infinitely above the masses and remarkable for their excellent partial insights, frankly denied creation. How can one speak to such people of celestial punishments without enraging them? *No physical event can have a superior cause relative to man*: that is its dogma. Sometimes perhaps it will not dare to articulate it in general terms; but when it comes to application, it will constantly deny it in detail, which amounts to the same thing. I can cite a remarkable example, which has something entertaining about it, although it is saddening in another respect. Nothing shocked them more than the Flood, which is the greatest and most terrible judgment that divinity has ever executed upon humankind, and yet nothing was better established by all kinds of evidence capable of proving a great fact. What then to do? They began by obstinately refusing us all the water necessary for the Flood; and I remember that, in my prime, my youthful faith was alarmed by their reasoning. But since the idea of creating a world by precipitation has occurred to them, and water being absolutely necessary for this remarkable operation, the lack of water no longer troubled them, and they have even gone so far as to generously grant us a *portion of it.*Three leagues high across the entire surface of the globe; which is quite plausible. Some even imagined calling upon Moses for help and forcing him, through the strangest tortures, to testify in favor of their cosmogonic dreams. Of course, however, divine intervention remains entirely foreign to this event, which is nothing extraordinary: thus, they accepted the total submersion of the globe at the very time predicted by this great man, which seemed sufficient to declare themselves serious *defenders of the revelation*; but not a word about *God*, *crime*, or *punishment*. We were even gently insinuated *that there were no humans on Earth at the time of the great submersion*, which is quite *Mosaic*, as you can see. The word " *flood"* having something *theological about it that is objectionable, it was eliminated, and " catastrophe"* was used instead: thus, they accept the *flood*, which they needed for their vain theories, and they remove from it *God*, who tires them. There, I think, is a rather clear symptom of *theophobia*.

I wholeheartedly honor the many exceptions that console the eye of the observer; and even among the writers who have saddened legitimate belief, I gladly make the necessary distinctions; but the general character of this philosophy is no less as I have shown you; and it is this philosophy which, by working tirelessly to separate man from divinity, has finally produced the deplorable generation which has done or allowed to be done all that we see.

For us gentlemen, let us also have our *theophobia*, but let it be the right one; and if sometimes supreme justice frightens us, let us remember this saying of Saint Augustine, one of the most beautiful undoubtedly that has come out of a human mouth: *Are you afraid of God? Save yourself in his arms*.

Allow me to believe, Sir Knight, that you are perfectly at ease concerning *the eternal and immutable laws*. There is nothing necessary but God, and nothing less so than evil. All evil is a punishment, and all punishment (except the last) is inflicted by love as much as by justice.

THE KNIGHT

I am delighted that my little quarrels have earned us some reflections from which I will make use of: but what do you mean, I pray you, with these words, *except the last one*?

THE COUNT

Look around you, Sir Knight; consider the actions of human justice: what does it do when it condemns a man to a punishment less than capital punishment? It does two things with regard to the guilty party: it punishes him; this is the work of justice; but moreover, it seeks to correct him, and this is the work of love. If it were not permitted to hope that the punishment would suffice to bring the guilty party to his senses, it would almost always punish him with death; but when he has finally succeeded, either through repetition or through the sheer number of his crimes, in persuading it that he is incorrigible, love withdraws, and justice pronounces an eternal sentence; for all death is eternal: how could a dead man cease to be dead? Yes, undoubtedly, both forms of justice punish only in order to

correct; and every punishment, *except the last*, is a remedy: but the last *is death*. All traditions testify in favor of this theory, and even fable proclaims the appalling truth:

There Theseus is sitting, and always will be.

This river that can only be crossed once; this Danaids' barrel, *always* full and *always* empty; this liver of Tityus, *always reborn under the beak of the vulture that always* devours it; this Tantalus, *always* ready to drink this water, to seize these fruits that *always* flee from him, this stone of Sisyphus *always* raised or pursued; this circle, eternal symbol of eternity, written on the wheel of Ixion, are all speaking hieroglyphs, on which it is impossible to be mistaken.

We can therefore contemplate divine justice in our own, as in a mirror—dull, admittedly, but faithful—which can reflect back to us no other images than those it has received. We will see there that punishment can have no other end than to remove evil, so that the greater and more deeply rooted the evil, the longer and more painful the process. But if man makes himself entirely evil, how can he tear it from himself? And what hold does he leave for love? All true instruction, therefore, mingling fear with consoling ideas, warns the free being not to advance to the point where there is no longer any end.

THE SENATOR

I would like to say a great deal more to Monsieur le Chevalier, for I have not for a moment forgotten his exclamation: " *And what shall we say of the war?"* Now, it seems to me that this scourge deserves to be examined separately. But I realize that the earthquakes have led us too far astray. We must part ways. Tomorrow, gentlemen, if you deem it appropriate, I will share with you some thoughts on the war; for it is a subject I have given much thought to.

THE KNIGHT

I have little to praise about her, I assure you; however, I don't know how it happens that I always like to do it or talk about it: so I will hear you with the greatest pleasure.

THE COUNT

For my part, I accept our friend's commitment; but I do not promise that I will have nothing more to say about prayer tomorrow.

THE SENATOR

In that case, I'll give you the floor for tomorrow; but I won't take mine back. Goodbye.

END OF THE FIFTH INTERVIEW

SIXTH INTERVIEW

THE SENATOR

I have expressly given you the floor, my dear friend: so it is up to you to begin.

THE COUNT

I am not taking it up because you are abandoning it to me, for that would be a reason for me to refuse it; but it is solely to avoid leaving a gap in our conversation. Allow me, therefore, to add a few reflections to those I presented to you yesterday on an interesting subject: it is precisely to the war that I owe these ideas; but let our dear senator not be alarmed, he can be sure that I have no desire to encroach upon his territory.

There is nothing so common as these pronouncements: *Whether one prays or not, events will take their course: one prays and one is defeated*, etc. Now, it seems to me very essential to observe that it is strictly impossible to prove this proposition: *One prayed for a just war, and the war was disastrous*. I will pass over the point on the legitimacy of war, which is already an excessively ambiguous point; I will stick to prayer: how can one prove *that one has prayed*? One would think that for that it suffices to have rung the bells and opened the churches. It is not so, gentlemen; *Nicole, a competent author of some good writings*, said somewhere that *the essence of prayer is desire*; this is not true, but what is certain...

THE SENATOR

With your permission, my dear friend, *that is not true* is a bit strong; and with your permission again, the same proposition can be read word for word in Fénelon *'s Maxims of the Saints*, who copied or consulted Nicole little, if I am not mistaken.

THE COUNT

If they had both said it, I would feel justified in thinking that they were both mistaken. I agree, however, that the initial impression favors this maxim, and that several ascetic writers, ancient and modern, have expressed themselves in this way, without intending to delve into the matter; but when one comes to plumb the depths of the human heart and demand an exact account of its movements, one finds oneself strangely perplexed, and Fénelon himself was well aware of this; for in more than one passage of his Spiritual Works, he expressly retracts or restricts his general proposition. He affirms, without the slightest ambiguity, *that one can strive to love, strive to desire, strive to will to love; that one can pray even while lacking the efficient cause of this will; that willing certainly depends on us, but feeling does not;* and a thousand other things of this kind. Finally, he expresses himself in a passage so energetic and original that whoever has read it will never forget it. It is in one of his spiritual letters where he says: *If God bores you, tell him that he bores you; that you prefer the vilest amusements to his presence; that you are only at ease far from him; tell him:* “See my misery and my ingratitude. O God! Take my heart, since I cannot give it to you; have pity on me in spite of myself.”

Do you find here, gentlemen, the maxim of desire and love indispensable to prayer? I do not have Fénelon's precious book at hand at the moment; but you can easily make the necessary checks.

Moreover, if he has exaggerated the good here or there, he has admitted it; let us speak of it only to praise him and to exalt the triumph of his unwavering obedience. Standing tall, with his arm outstretched to instruct mankind, he may have an equal; prostrate to condemn himself, he has none.

But Nicole is a different man, and I offer him fewer compliments; for that maxim which offends me in his writings stemmed from the dangerous school of Port-Royal and its entire disastrous system, which aims directly to discourage man and lead him imperceptibly from discouragement to hardening or despair, while awaiting grace and desire. Everything these rebellious doctors write displeases me, even the good things they have written; *I fear the Greeks even in their gifts*. What is desire? Is it, as has often been said, the *love of an absent good?* But if that is so, since love, at least sensible love, cannot be commanded, man cannot pray before that love arrives of its own accord; otherwise, desire would have to precede desire, which seems to me rather difficult. And how will man proceed, supposing that there is no true prayer without desire and love; how will he proceed, I say, to ask, as his duty often compels him to do, for what his nature abhors? Nicole's proposition seems to me to be nullified by the sole commandment to *love our enemies*.

THE SENATOR

It seems to me that Locke settled the matter by deciding that *we could raise desire within us in exact proportion to the dignity of the good that is offered to us*.

THE COUNT

Believe me, don't trust Locke, who never truly understood anything. *Desire*, which he didn't define at all, *is merely a movement of the soul toward an object that attracts it*. This movement is a fact of the moral world, certainly, as palpable as magnetism and, moreover, as general as universal gravitation in the physical world. But since man is continually agitated by two opposing forces, the examination of this terrible law must be the beginning of any study of man. Locke, by neglecting it, was able to write fifty pages on liberty without even knowing what he was talking about. This law being established as an indisputable fact, pay close attention: if an object does not act upon man by its own nature, it is not within our power to create desire, since we cannot create in the object a force it does not possess. And if, on the contrary, this force exists in the object, it is not within our power to destroy it, since man has no power over the essence of external things, which are what they are, without him and independently of him. To what, then, does man's power amount? To working around and upon himself, to weaken, to destroy, or, on the contrary, to liberate or make victorious the action whose influence he experiences. In the first case, the simplest thing is to move away, as one would move a piece of iron away from the active sphere of a magnet, if one wished to remove it from the action of that power. Man can also voluntarily expose himself, by the means given, to a contrary attraction; or bind himself to something immobile; or place between himself and the object some substance capable of intercepting its action, as glass refuses to transmit electrical action; Or, finally, he can work on himself to make himself less or not at all attractive: which, as you see, is much safer, and certainly possible, but also much more difficult. In the second case, he must act in precisely the opposite way; he must, according to his strength, approach the object, remove or annihilate the obstacles, and remember above all that, according to the accounts of some travelers, extreme cold has been able to extinguish the magnet's attraction to the *pole*. Let man therefore beware of the *cold*.

But by reasoning, even according to Locke's ideas, whether false or incomplete, it will always remain certain that *we have the power to resist desire*, a power without which there is no freedom. Now, if man can resist desire, and even act against desire, he can therefore pray without desire and even against desire, since prayer is an act of the will like any other, and consequently, subject to the general law. Desire *is* not the will; but only a passion of the will; and since the action that acts upon it is not invincible, it follows that to truly pray, one must necessarily will, but not *desire*, prayer being by its very nature nothing *but a movement of the will through the understanding*. What deceives us on this point is that we ordinarily ask only for what we desire, and that many of those chosen ones who have spoken of prayer since humankind learned to pray, having almost extinguished within themselves the fatal law, no longer experienced a struggle between will and desire: yet two forces acting in the same direction are nonetheless essentially distinct. Admire here how two men, perhaps equally enlightened, though quite unequal in talents and merits, arrived at the same exaggeration starting from entirely different principles. Nicole, seeing only grace in legitimate desire, left nothing to the will, in order to give everything to this grace that departed from him to punish him for the greatest crime one can commit against it: that of attributing to it more than it desires; and Fénelon, whom she had penetrated, took prayer for desire, because in his celestial heart desire had never abandoned prayer.

THE SENATOR

Do you believe that one can desire desire?

THE COUNT

Ah! You ask me a profound question. Fénelon, who was certainly a *man of desire*, seems to lean toward the affirmative, if, as I believe I read in his works, one can *desire to love, strive to desire, and strive to will to love*. If some metaphysician worthy of the name wished to treat this question thoroughly, I would suggest as an epigraph this passage from the Psalms: " *I have longed for your commandments.* " Until this dissertation is completed, I maintain: *This is not true*; or if this decision seems too harsh to you, I consent to say: *This is not true enough*. But what you will not dispute (and this is what I was about to tell you when you interrupted me) *is that the essence of prayer is faith*; and you see this truth even in the temporal realm. Do you believe that a prince would be well-disposed to bestow his favors upon men who doubted his sovereignty or blasphemed his benevolence? But if there

can be no *prayer* without faith, there can be no *effective prayer* without purity. You understand well enough that I do not intend to give this word " *purity"* a strict meaning: what would become of us, alas! if the guilty could not pray? But you also understand, continuing with the same analogy, that insulting a prince would be a poor way to solicit his favors. The guilty person has no other right, properly speaking, than that of praying for himself. Never have I attended one of those holy ceremonies intended to ward off plagues from heaven or to beseech its favor without asking myself, with genuine terror: *Amidst these pompous chants and august rites, among this assembled crowd of men, how many, by their faith and their works, have the right to pray, and the well-founded hope of praying effectively? How many are truly praying? One is thinking of his business, another of his pleasures; a third is preoccupied with the music; perhaps the least blameworthy is the one who yawns without knowing where he is. Again, how many are praying, and how many are worthy of having their prayers answered?*

THE KNIGHT

For my part, I am already sure that, in these solemn and pious gatherings, there was at least most certainly one man who was not praying... it was you, Count, who was occupied with these philosophical reflections instead of praying.

THE COUNT

You sometimes set my teeth on edge with your Gallicisms; what a marvelous gift for mockery! You never lack it, even in the midst of the most serious discussions; but that's how you French are!

THE KNIGHT

Believe me, my dear friend, we are worth far more than others when we are not feverish; believe me, our wit is needed in this world. Reason is not very penetrating by nature, and does not easily make itself known; it often needs to be, so to speak, *armed* by the formidable epigram. The French point pierces like a needle, to draw the thread through. – What, for example, do you have to say in response to my *sharp remark*?

THE COUNT

I don't want to ask you to account for all the *sons* your nation has produced; but I assure you that, this time, I readily forgive your jest, especially since I can immediately turn it into an argument. If the mere fear of praying incorrectly can prevent one from praying, what are we to think of those who don't know how to pray, who barely remember having prayed, who don't even believe in the efficacy of prayer? The more you examine the matter, the more convinced you will be that there is nothing so difficult as offering a true prayer.

THE SENATOR

A necessary consequence of what you say is that there is no composition more difficult than that of a true written prayer, which is and can only be the faithful expression of inner prayer; this, it seems to me, is not paid enough attention to.

THE COUNT

How then, Senator! You touch upon one of the most essential points of true doctrine. There is nothing truer than what you say; and although the written prayer is but an image, it nevertheless serves us to judge the original, which is invincible. It is no small treasure, even for philosophy alone, that the material monuments of prayer, such as men of all ages have left them to us, are such; for we can base three fine observations on this alone.

Firstly, all nations of the world have prayed, but always by virtue of a true or supposed revelation; that is to say, by virtue of ancient traditions. As soon as man relies solely on his reason, he ceases to pray, in which he has always confessed, without realizing it, that he knows neither what he should ask for, nor how he should pray, nor even precisely to whom he should address himself. In vain, therefore, will the deist display the most beautiful

theories on the existence and attributes of God; without objecting (which is nevertheless undeniable) that he derives them only from his catechism, we will always be within our rights to say to him, as *Joash did*: YOU DO NOT PRAY TO HIM.

My second observation is that all religions are more or less fruitful in prayer; but the third is incomparably the most important, and here it is:

Command your hearts to be attentive, and read all these prayers: you will see the true religion as you see the sun.

THE SENATOR

I have made this last observation a thousand times while attending our beautiful liturgy. Such prayers could only have arisen from truth, and within the heart of truth.

THE COUNT

That is indeed my opinion. In one way or another, God has spoken to all men; but there are some privileged ones to whom it is permitted to say: *He has not treated other nations thus*; for God alone, according to the incomparable expression of the incomparable Apostle, *can create in the heart of man a spirit capable of crying out*: MY FATHER! And David had foreshadowed this truth by exclaiming: *It is he who has put a new song in my mouth, a hymn worthy of our God*. Now, if this spirit is not in the heart of man, how can he pray? Or how can his powerless pen write what is not dictated to the one who holds it? Read the hymns of Santeuil, perhaps somewhat hastily adopted by the Church of Paris: they make a certain sound in the ear; But they never *pray*, because he *was alone* when he composed them. The beauty of prayer has nothing in common with that of expression: for prayer is like the mysterious daughter of the great king; *all its beauty is born from within*. It is something that has no name, but that one feels perfectly and that talent alone cannot imitate.

But since nothing is more difficult than *prayer*, it is both the height of blindness and temerity to dare to say that one has prayed and has not been answered. I want to speak to you especially about nations, for this is a central issue in these kinds of questions. To avert evil, to obtain a national good, it is certainly right that the nation *should pray*. Now, what is a nation? And what conditions are necessary for a nation *to pray*? Are there men in each country who have the right to *pray* for it, and do they derive this right from their inner dispositions, or from their rank within that nation, or from both circumstances combined? We know very little of the secrets of the spiritual world; and how could we, since no one cares about them? Without wishing to delve into these depths, I will confine myself to the general proposition that *it will never be possible to prove that a nation has prayed without being heard*; and I believe myself equally certain of the affirmative proposition, that is, that *every nation that prays is heard*. Exceptions would prove nothing, even if they could be verified; and all would vanish before the simple observation that *no one can know, even when praying perfectly, whether they are asking for something harmful to themselves or to the general order*. Let us therefore pray without ceasing, let us pray with all our strength, and with all the dispositions that can legitimize this great act of intelligent being: above all, let us never forget that every true prayer is effective in some way. Not all petitions presented to the sovereign are granted, nor can they be, for not all are reasonable. All, however, contain an explicit profession of faith in the sovereign's power, goodness, and justice, who cannot help but be pleased to see them flow forth from all parts of his empire. And just as it is impossible to beseech the prince without thereby performing an act of faithful subjection, it is likewise impossible to pray to God without placing oneself in a relationship of submission, trust, and love with Him. Thus, prayer, considered in itself, possesses a purifying virtue whose effect is almost always infinitely better for us than what we too often ask for in our ignorance. Every legitimate prayer, even if it is not to be answered, nonetheless rises to the higher realms, from whence it falls upon us, after undergoing certain preparations, like a beneficent dew that prepares us for another homeland. But when we simply ask God *that his will be done* That is to say, only when evil disappears from the universe can we be certain that our prayers have not been in vain. Blind and foolish as we are! Instead of complaining about not being heard, let us rather tremble at having asked wrongly, or at having asked for evil. The same power that commands us to pray also teaches us how and in what state of mind we should pray. To fail to obey the first commandment is to degrade ourselves to the level of a brute, even an atheist; to fail to obey

the second is to expose ourselves to yet another great anathema, that *of seeing our prayer transformed into a crime*.

Let us no longer, driven by foolish fervor,
To prescribe to Heaven its gifts and favors.
Let us ask him for fair prudence.
Sincere, charitable piety;
Let us ask him for his grace, his love;
And if it were to happen to us one day
To tire his easy indulgence
Let us provide for ourselves in advance with other wishes.
Enough zeal and enough virtues
To become worthy of his refusals 23.

THE KNIGHT

I do not regret, my good friend, having chilled you to *the bone*. I gained, first of all, the pleasure of being scolded by you, which always does me immense good; and I gained something even better. I fear, in truth, that I am becoming quarrelsome with you; for man rarely refrains from doing what brings him pleasure and profit. But do not deny me, I beg you, a very great satisfaction; you chilled me *in* turn when I heard you speak of Locke with such irreverence. We still have time, as you see; I gladly sacrifice for you a *Boston tortoise* that awaits me in good and charming company, if you would be so kind as to give me your detailed opinion on this famous author, of whom I have never heard you speak without noticing in you a certain irritation that I cannot understand.

THE COUNT

My God! I have nothing to refuse you; but I foresee that you will draw me into a long and dreary dissertation, and to tell you the truth, I don't quite know how I will extricate myself from it without disappointing your expectations or boring you—two drawbacks I would like to avoid equally, which doesn't seem easy. Besides, I fear being led too far astray.

THE KNIGHT

I confess that this misfortune seems minor, even trivial. Must one then write an epic poem to have the privilege of experiencing these episodes?

THE COUNT

Oh! You're never embarrassed by anything, are you? As for me, I have my reasons for being afraid to embark on this discussion. But if you wish to encourage me, please begin by sitting down. You have a restlessness that makes me uneasy. I don't know what imp is constantly bothering you, but what's certain is that you can't stay still for ten minutes; most of the time, my words have to chase you like lead shot after a bird in flight. What I have to say may well resemble a sermon; so you must listen to me sitting down. – Very well! Now, my dear knight, let's begin, if you please, with an act of frankness. Speak to me honestly: have you read Locke?

THE KNIGHT

No, never. I have no reason to hide it from you. I only remember opening it one day in the countryside, on a rainy day; but it was just an attitude.

THE COUNT

I don't always want to scold you: you sometimes have quite felicitous expressions. Indeed, Locke's book is almost never picked up and opened except *by habit*. Among serious books, there is none less read. One of my great curiosities, but one that cannot be satisfied, would be to know how many people in Paris have read, from beginning to end, the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. It is talked about and quoted a great deal, but always on hearsay; I myself have spoken of it boldly, like so many others, without having read it. In the end, however, wanting to acquire the right to speak of it conscientiously, that is to say, with full and complete knowledge of the facts, I calmly read it from the first word to the last, pen in hand.

But I was fifty years old when that happened to me.

And I don't think I've ever devoured such boredom in my life. You know my valor in this genre.

THE KNIGHT

If I know her, didn't I see you reading last year a deadly German octavo volume on the Apocalypse? I remember seeing you at the end of that reading, full of life and health, I told you that after such an ordeal *you could be compared to a cannon that has withstood a double charge*.

THE COUNT

And yet I can assure you that the German work, compared to the *Essay on Human Understanding*, is a light pamphlet, a book of entertainment, quite literally; at least one reads some very interesting things in it. One learns, for example, that *the purple with which abominable Babylon once supplied foreign nations obviously refers to the red robes of cardinals; that in Rome the ancient statues of false gods are displayed in churches*, and a thousand other things of this kind, equally useful and entertaining. But in the *Essay*, nothing consoles you; one must traverse this book, like the sands of Libya, without encountering even the slightest *oasis*, the smallest patch of greenery where one can breathe. There are books of which people say: Show me the flaw that is in them. As for the *Essay,* I can well tell you: *Show me the one that is not in it*. Name whomever you like, from among those you deem most capable of denigrating a book, and I will give you an example at once, *without even searching*: the preface itself is shocking beyond words. " *I hope*," Locke says, " *that the reader who buys my book will not regret his money*." What a stench of a shop! Continue reading, and you will see that *his book is the fruit of a few laborious hours he didn't know what to do with; that he greatly amused himself by composing this work, for the reason that one finds as much pleasure in hunting larks or sparrows as in hunting foxes or deer; that, finally, his book was begun by chance, continued out of complacency, written in incoherent fragments, often abandoned and resumed in the same way, according to the dictates of whim or occasion*. This, it must be admitted, is a peculiar tone from an author who is about to discuss human understanding, the spirituality of the soul, freedom, and finally, God. Imagine the uproar from our ponderous *ideologues* if these impertinent platitudes were found in a preface by Malebranche.

But you cannot imagine, gentlemen, before moving on to something more essential, how much Locke's book lends itself, firstly, to outright ridicule, because of the crude expressions he so loved and which flowed from his pen with marvelous relish. Sometimes Locke will tell you, in a second and third edition, and after having thought it over with all his might, *that a clear idea is an object that the human mind has before its eyes*. *– Before its eyes?* Imagine, if you can, something more substantial.

Sometimes he will speak of memory as a box where ideas are stored for convenience, separate from the mind, as if there could be anything else in it besides the mind itself. Elsewhere he portrays memory as a *secretary who keeps ledgers*. Here he presents human intelligence as a dark chamber pierced by a few windows through which light enters, and there he complains *of a certain type of person who force men to swallow innate principles that are no longer open to debate*. Forced to skim over so many different subjects, I ask you to always assume that for every example my memory can provide, I could add a hundred more if I were writing a dissertation. The chapter on Locke's discoveries alone could amuse you for two days.

He was the one who discovered that *for there to be confusion in ideas, there must be at least two of them*. So that in a thousand whole years, an idea, as long as it is alone, cannot be confused with another.

It was he who discovered that if men have not thought to transfer to the animal species the names of kinship received among them; that if, for example, we do not OFTEN say: *This bull is the ancestor of this calf; these two pigeons are first cousins*, it is because these names are useless to us with regard to animals, whereas they are necessary from man to man, to settle successions in the courts, or for other reasons.

It was he who discovered that if we do not find in modern languages national names to express, for example, *ostracism* or *proscription*, it is because there is neither *ostracism* nor *proscription* among the peoples who speak these languages, and this consideration leads him to a general theorem which sheds the greatest light on the whole metaphysics of language: *It is that men rarely speak to themselves and never to others of things which have not received a name*: so (please note this well, for it is a principle) that *which has no name will never be named in conversation*.

He was the one who discovered that *relationships can change without the subject changing*. You are a father, for example: your son dies; Locke finds that you cease to be a father instantly, even if your son had died in America; *however, no change has taken place in you: and from whatever angle you look at you, you will always be found to be the same*.

THE KNIGHT

Ah! He is charming! Do you know that if he were still alive, I would go to London all the way to kiss him.

THE COUNT

However, I would not let you leave, my dear knight, before explaining the doctrine of negative ideas. Locke would first teach you *that there are negative expressions that do not directly produce positive ideas*, which you will readily believe. You would then learn that a negative idea is nothing other than a positive idea PLUS the idea of the absence of the thing; which is obvious, as he demonstrates to you immediately with the idea of silence. Indeed, *what is silence?* – It is noise PLUS the absence of noise.

And what is NOTHINGNESS? (this is important; for it is the most general expression of negative ideas). Locke answers with a depth that cannot be sufficiently praised: *It is the idea of being, to which only the idea of the absence of being* is added, for greater certainty.

But even *nothing* is nothing compared to all the wonderful things I could tell you about Locke's talent for definitions in general. I recommend this point as very essential, since it is one of the most amusing. You may know that Voltaire, with that light touch which never left him, told us that *Locke is the first philosopher who taught men to define the words they use, and that, with his great wisdom, he never ceases to say*: DEFINE! Now, this is exquisite; for it so happens that Locke is precisely the first philosopher who said, *"Do not define!"* and yet who never ceased to define, and in a way that surpasses all bounds of the ridiculous.

Would you be curious, for example, to know what *power* is? Locke will be kind enough to teach you that *it is the succession of simple ideas, some of which are born and others perish*. You are dazzled, no doubt, by this clarity; but I can cite far more beautiful things to you. In vain do all metaphysicians warn us with one voice not to try to define those lofty notions that themselves serve to define others. Locke's genius soars above these heights: and he is able, for example, to give us a definition of existence *far* clearer than the idea awakened in our minds by the mere utterance of the word. He teaches you that existence is the idea that is in our minds, and *that we consider as being actually* THERE, *or the object that we consider as being actually outside of us*.

One would hardly believe it possible to rise higher if one did not immediately encounter the definition of unity. You may know how Alexander's tutor once defined it in its most general sense. *Unity*, he said, *is being*; and chimerical unity, in particular, *is the beginning and measure of all quantity*. Not so bad, as you see! But it is here, however, that the progress of enlightenment is striking. *Unity*, says Locke, *is everything that can be considered as one thing, whether real being or idea. To this definition, which would have given the late Monsieur de la Palice* a

fit of jealousy, Locke adds, with the utmost seriousness: *"Thus the understanding acquires the idea of unity*." We are, certainly, well advanced on the origin of ideas.

The definition of solidity also has its merits. *It is what prevents two bodies moving towards each other from being able to touch*. He who has always judged Locke on his reputation can scarcely believe his eyes or ears when he finally judges for himself; but I can still astonish even astonishment by quoting you the definition of the atom: *It is a continuous body*, says Locke, *in an immutable form*.

Would you now be curious to learn what Locke knew about the natural sciences? Listen to this carefully, I beg you. You know that when estimating speeds in ordinary conversation, one rarely has distances to compare, since one quite commonly relates these speeds to the same distance traveled. To estimate, for example, the speeds of two horses, I will not tell you that one went from here to *Strelna* in forty minutes, and the other to *Kamitzi-Ostroff* in ten minutes, thus obliging you to take out your pencil and perform an arithmetic operation to know what that means; but I will tell you that the two horses went, I suppose, from *Saint Petersburg to Strelna*, one in forty minutes, and the other in fifty: now, it is obvious that, in these kinds of cases, speeds being simply proportional to time, one has no distances to compare. Well! Gentlemen, this profound mathematics was beyond Locke's grasp. He believed that his fellow humans had not yet realized that, in estimating speeds, space must be taken into consideration. He laments gravely: " *That men, after measuring time by the motion of celestial bodies, should then presume* to measure motion by time, while it is clear, upon *a little reflection, that space must be taken into consideration as well as time*." Truly, what a remarkable discovery! Many thanks to Master John for deigning to share it with us; but you have not yet heard the end of it. Locke also discovered that *for a more insightful person* (such as himself, for example), it *will remain certain that an accurate estimation of motion requires further consideration of the mass of the body in motion*. Does Locke mean that, in *estimating* the quantity of motion, any intelligent *person will realize that mass must be taken into account?* That's utter nonsense. Or does he mean, on the contrary (which is infinitely probable), *that, in estimating speed, a person* of genius *understands that one must consider* the distance traveled, *and that if they* are even more brilliant, *they will realize that one must also pay attention to mass?* Then it seems to me that no language provides a word capable of describing this proposition.

You see, gentlemen, what Locke knew about the elements of the natural sciences. Would you like to know his erudition? Here is a marvelous sample. Nothing is more famous in the history of human opinion than the dispute of the ancient philosophers concerning the true sources of happiness, or the *summum bonum*. Now, do you know how Locke understood the question? He believed that the ancient philosophers were disputing, not about right, but about fact; he transforms a question of morality and high philosophy into a simple question of taste or whim, and on this fine insight he decides, with a rare depth, *that it would be just as worthwhile to argue about whether the greatest pleasure of taste is found in apples, plums, or nuts*. He is learned, as you see, as much as he is moral and magnificent.

Would you like to know now how thoroughly Locke was dominated by the crudest sectarian prejudices, and to what extent Protestantism had flattened his mind? He wanted, somewhere in his book, to speak of the *Real Presence*. On that, I have nothing to say: he was a Reformed man, he could very well indulge in that pastime; but he was obliged to speak at least like a man with his head on his shoulders, instead of telling us, as he did, *that the adherents of this dogma believe it because they have associated in their minds the idea of the simultaneous presence of a body in several places with that of the infallibility of a certain person*. What can be said of a man who was quite adept at reading Bellarmine; of a man who was a contemporary of Petau and Bossuet; who could hear the bells of Calais from Dover; who had traveled elsewhere, and even resided in France? who had spent his life amidst the clamor of controversies; and who seriously believes that the Catholic Church believes in the Real Presence *on the faith* of a certain person *who gives his word of honor*? This is not one of those distractions, one of those purely human errors that we are interested in forgiving each other for; it is a unique, inconceivable act of ignorance, one that would have shamed a shop boy in County Mansfeld in the 16th ^{century}; and what is truly priceless is that Locke, with that tone of scurrility which never abandons, when it comes to contested dogmas, even the wisest and most elegant Protestant pens, bluntly charges us with SWALLOWING this *dogma without examination*. – Without examination! He's joking! And who does he take us for? Do we perhaps not have as much wit as he does? I confess that if I were to learn this suddenly through revelation, I would be very surprised.

Furthermore, gentlemen, you surely realize that a thorough examination of a work as lengthy as the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* goes beyond the bounds of conversation. At best, it allows us to grasp the

general spirit of the book and its particularly dangerous or ridiculous aspects. If you are ever called upon to undertake a rigorous examination of the *Essay*, I recommend the chapter on liberty. *La Harpe*, forgetting what he had said more than once— *that he understood only literature* —was ecstatic about Locke's definition of liberty. " *There it is*," he said majestically, " *there's philosophy!"* He should have said: " *There's proof of incapacity!"* since Locke defines liberty as the power to act, whereas this word, purely negative, signifies only the *absence of an obstacle*, so that liberty is and can only be the *unhindered will*, that is to say, the *will itself*. Condillac, adding a decisive tone to his master's mediocrity, said in turn that *liberty is merely the power to do what one does not do, or not to do what one does*. This charming antithesis may no doubt dazzle a mind unfamiliar with such discussions; but for any educated or discerning person, it is evident that Condillac here mistakes the result or outward sign of liberty, which is physical action, for liberty itself, which is entirely moral. *Liberty is the power to act!* How so? Does not a man imprisoned and bound in chains have the power to make himself, without acting, guilty of all crimes? He has only to will it. Ovid, on this point, speaks like the Gospel: " *Qui, quia non licitit, non facit, ille facit" (He who does not have the right, does not act, he does)*. If, therefore, liberty is not the *power to act*, it can only be *the power to will*; but the power to will is the will itself. And to ask whether the *will can will* is to ask whether *perception has the power to perceive*; whether *reason has the power to reason*; that is to say, whether the circle is a circle, the triangle a triangle, and so on; in short, whether *essence is essence*. Now, if you consider that God himself cannot force the will, since a *forced will* is a *contradiction in terms*, you will feel that the will can only be stirred and guided by attraction.(an admirable word that all the philosophers together could not have invented). Now, attraction can have no other effect on the will than to increase its energy by making it desire more, so that attraction can no more harm freedom or the will than teaching, of whatever kind, can harm the understanding. The anathema that weighs upon unfortunate human nature is this twofold attraction:

Vim felt geminam paretque incerta duobus 24.

The philosopher who reflects on this terrible enigma will do justice to the Stoics, who once divined a fundamental dogma of Christianity by declaring that *only the wise man is free*. Today, this is no longer a paradox, but an undeniable and paramount truth. *Where the spirit of God is, there is freedom*. Any man who has missed these ideas will eternally circle around the principle, like Bernoulli's curve, without ever touching it. Now, do you want to understand how far Locke, on this subject as on so many others, was from the truth? Listen carefully, I beg you, for this is ineffable. He maintained *that freedom, which is a faculty, has nothing in common with the will, which is another faculty; and that it is no less absurd to ask whether man's will is free than it would be to ask whether his sleep is swift, or whether* his virtue is square. What do you say to that?

THE SENATOR

That, for example, is a bit much! But would your memory still be kind enough to remind you of the proof of this beautiful theorem? For no doubt he provided one.

THE COUNT

It's a genre that cannot be forgotten, and you'll judge for yourself. Listen carefully.

You are crossing a bridge; it collapses: the moment you feel it sink beneath your feet, the effort of your will, if it were free, *would undoubtedly carry you to the opposite side; but its momentum is useless: the sacred laws of gravitation must be obeyed in the universe; one must fall and perish:* THEREFORE, *freedom has nothing in common with will*. I hope you are convinced; however, Locke's inexhaustible genius can present the demonstration to you in an even more illuminating light.

A sleeping man is transported to his mistress's house, or, as Locke says with his characteristic elegant precision, *to a room where there is someone he is dying to see and converse with*. The moment he awakens, his will is as content as yours was a moment ago when it fell under the bridge. Now, it so happens that this man, thus transported, cannot leave *this room where there is someone*, etc., *because the door has been locked*, as Locke says: THEREFORE, *liberty has nothing to do with the will*.

For once, I flatter myself that you have nothing more to desire; but to speak seriously, what do you say to a philosopher capable of writing such absurdities!

But everything I have quoted is either false or ridiculous, or both; and Locke has certainly earned other reproaches. What a lifeline he offered to materialism (which hastened to seize it) in its shipwreck, by maintaining that *thought can belong to matter*! I truly believe that, in principle, this assertion was merely a lighthearted remark that escaped Locke *in one of those moments of boredom when he didn't know what to do with it*; and I have no doubt that he would have removed it had some friend gently advised him, just as he changed the entire chapter on liberty in a new edition, which had been found to be too flawed. Unfortunately, the clergy interfered, and Locke could not abide them; he therefore persisted and never went back on his word. Read his reply to the Bishop of Worcester; You will sense in it a certain barely suppressed air of haughtiness, a certain poorly disguised acrimony, entirely natural to the man who, as you know, called the episcopal body of England the " *caput mortuum"* of the House of Peers. It wasn't that he didn't vaguely grasp the principles; but pride and commitment were stronger in him than conscience. He will confess as much as you like *that matter is, in itself, incapable of thought; that perception is by nature alien to it, and that it is impossible to imagine the contrary*. He will add further *that, by virtue of these principles, he has proven and even demonstrated the immateriality of the Supreme Thinking Being; and that the same reasons that underlie this demonstration bring to the highest degree of probability the supposition that the thinking principle in man is immaterial*. At this point, you might think that since probability raised to its highest power must always be taken for certainty, the matter is settled: but Locke does not back down. It will be conceded, if you will, that since omnipotence cannot act upon itself, it must allow its essence to be what it is; but he does not want the same to be true of created essences, which it molds as it pleases. *Indeed*, he says with dazzling wisdom, *it is absurd insolence to dispute God's power to* add *a certain* excellence to a certain portion *of matter by imparting to it vegetation, life, feeling, and finally thought*. This is, in proper terms, to deny him the power to create; *for if God has the power to add to a certain mass of matter a certain* excellence *that makes it a horse, why should he not be able* to add *to that same mass another* excellence *that makes it a thinking being?* I confess, I yield to the weight of this argument; but, as one must be fair even to those one does not like, I will readily agree that Locke can be excused to a certain extent, observing, which is undeniable, that he did not understand himself.

THE KNIGHT

Any surprise that doesn't cause trouble is a pleasure. I can't tell you how much you amuse me by saying that Locke *didn't understand himself*; if by chance you are right, you will have brought me back from the brink.

THE COUNT

Nothing will be less surprising than your surprise, my dear friend. You judge according to the received prejudice that stubbornly regards Locke as a thinker: I too wholeheartedly agree to regard him as such, provided it is granted to me (which, I believe, cannot be denied) that his thoughts do not lead him far. He may have *looked* a great deal, if you will, but *seen* little. He always stops at the first impression; and as soon as it is a question of examining abstract ideas, his vision becomes clouded. I can still give you a singular example of this that presents itself to me at this moment.

Locke had said that bodies can only act upon one another by contact. *Tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res*. But when Newton published his famous book of *Principles*, Locke, with that weakness and haste of judgment which are, whatever one may say, the distinctive characteristic of his mind, hastened to declare *that he had learned from the incomparable book of the judicious Mr. Newton that God was indeed the master of doing what he wanted with matter, and consequently of giving it the power to act at a distance; that he, Locke, would not fail, therefore, to retract and make* his profession of faith in a new edition of the *Essay*.

Unfortunately, the *judicious Newton* bluntly declared, in one of his theological letters to Dr. Bentley, *that such an opinion could only reside in the mind of a fool*. I am perfectly clear in my conscience about that slap delivered to Locke's cheek by Newton's hand. Relying on this great authority, I repeat to you with even greater assurance that, in the question I mentioned earlier, Locke did not agree with himself, any more than he did with that of gravitation; and nothing could be clearer. The question had begun between the bishop and him concerning *whether*

a purely material being could think or not. Locke concluded that *without the aid of revelation, one can never know whether God has not seen fit to join and attach to duly arranged matter a thinking, immaterial substance*. You see, gentlemen, that all this is nothing but the English comedy * *Much Ado About Nothing* *. What does this man mean? And who has ever doubted that God could unite the thinking principle with organized matter? This is what happens to materialists of all kinds: believing they are maintaining that matter thinks, they inadvertently maintain that it can be united with thinking substance; a point no one is tempted to dispute. But Locke, if my memory serves me perfectly, maintained the identity of these two suppositions; in which respect, it must be admitted that, while he is more culpable, he is also less ridiculous.

I would also like, and indeed have the right, to ask this philosopher, who has spoken so much of the senses and who grants them so much, by what right he decided that *sight is the most instructive of the senses*. The French language, which is quite a beautiful intellectual work, does not share this opinion, possessing as it does the sublime word " *entendement* " (understanding), in which the entire theory of language is written. But what can we expect from a philosopher who seriously tells us: " *Now that languages are made!"* —he should have told us *when they were made, and when they were not yet made*.

If only I had the time to delve into his entire theory of *simple*, *complex*, *real*, *imaginary*, *adequate* ideas, and so on; some arising from the senses, others from reflection! If only I could speak to you at my leisure about his *archetypal* ideas, a sacred word for the Platonists who placed it in the heavens, and which this imprudent Breton extracted from it without knowing what he was doing! Soon his venomous disciple seized it in turn to plunge it into the mire of his crude *aesthetics*. "Modern metaphysicians," the latter tells us, "have made considerable use of this term ' *archetypal ideas*.'" No doubt, just as moralists have frequently employed the term ' *chastity*,' but as far as I know, never as a synonym for *prostitution*.

Locke is perhaps the only known author who took the trouble to refute his entire book or declare it useless from the outset, telling us that *all our ideas come to us through the senses or through reflection*. But who has ever denied that some ideas come to us through the senses, and what does Locke want to teach us? Since the number of simple perceptions is zero, compared to the countless combinations of thought, it is demonstrated in the first chapter of the second book that the vast majority of our ideas do not come from the senses. But where do they come from, then? The question is perplexing, and this is why his followers, fearing the consequences, no longer speak of reflection, which is very prudent.

Since Locke began his book without reflection and without any thorough knowledge of his subject, it is not surprising that he constantly floundered. He had initially posited that all our ideas come to us from the senses or from reflection. Then, *pressed* by his bishop, who kept a close eye on him, and perhaps also by his conscience, he came to admit that *general ideas* (which alone constitute the intelligent being) come neither from the senses nor from reflection, but that they are *inventions* and CREATURES *of the human mind*. For, according to the doctrine of this great philosopher, man *makes* general ideas *from* simple ideas, as he *makes* a boat *from* planks; so that the most elevated general ideas are merely collections, or, as Locke, who always seeks crude expressions, puts it, groups *of simple ideas*.

If you wish to bring these lofty concepts down to practical application, consider, for example, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It's a passable general idea. At its core, however, everything boils down to stones, which are simple ideas. It's not much, as you see; and yet the privilege of simple ideas is immense, since Locke also discovered that they are *all real* EXCEPT ALL. He *excludes* from this small *exception* only the primary qualities of bodies.

But admire here, I beg you, Locke's luminous progress: he first establishes that all our ideas come from the senses or from reflection, and he seizes this opportunity to tell us *that by reflection he means the knowledge the mind acquires of its various operations*. Then, applying himself to the torture of truth, he confesses that *general ideas come neither from the senses nor from reflection, but that they are created, or*, as he ridiculously puts it, INVENTED *by the human mind*. Now, since reflection has just been expressly excluded by Locke, it follows that the human mind *invents* general ideas *without reflection*, that is to say, *without any knowledge or examination of its own operations*. But every idea that arises neither from the mind's interaction with external objects, nor from the mind's work on itself, necessarily belongs to the substance of the mind. There are therefore ideas innate or prior to all experience: I see no more inevitable consequence; but this should not be surprising. All writers who have argued against innate ideas have found themselves led by the sheer force of truth to make confessions more or less

favorable to this system. I do not even exclude Condillac, although he was perhaps the 18th ¯ century philosopher most wary of his conscience. Moreover, I do not wish to compare these two men, whose characters are quite different: one lacks intellect and the other boldness. What reproaches, however, cannot one rightfully level at Locke, and how could one exonerate him from having shaken morality to overturn innate ideas without knowing what he was attacking? He himself, deep down, felt guilty; *but*, he said, to excuse himself while deceiving himself, *truth comes first*. Which means that truth precedes truth. Perhaps the most dangerous and culpable of those disastrous writers who will never cease to accuse the last century before posterity, the one who employed the most talent with the most cold-bloodedness to do the most harm, Hume, also told us in one of his terrible *Essays* that *truth comes first; that criticism shows little candor toward certain philosophers by reproaching them for the blows their opinions may deal to morality and religion, and that this injustice only serves to delay the discovery of truth.* But no one, unless they wish to deceive themselves, will fall for this perfidious sophism. No error can be useful, just as no truth can be harmful. The deception lies in the fact that, in the first case, error is confused with some element of truth mixed within it, which acts for good according to its nature, despite the mixture; and that, in the second case, the truth *proclaimed* is confused with the truth *received*. It can undoubtedly be imprudently presented, but it never harms except because it is rejected; whereas error, the knowledge of which can only be useful like that of poisons, begins to harm from the moment it has been able to be received under the guise of its divine enemy. It harms, therefore, *because it is received*, and truth can only harm *because it is fought against*: thus, everything that is harmful in itself is false, just as everything that is useful in itself is true. Nothing is so clear to someone who understands.

Blinded, however, by his supposed *respect for truth* —which, in such cases, is merely a public offense disguised under a fine name—Locke, in the first book of his dismal *Essay*, scours history and travel to shame humanity. He cites the most disgraceful dogmas and customs; he forgets himself to the point of exhuming from an obscure book a story that makes one vomit; and he takes care to tell us that, the book being rare, he deemed it appropriate to recount the anecdote in the author's own words, all this to establish *that there is no such thing as innate morality*. It is a pity that he neglected to produce a *nosology* to demonstrate that there is no such thing as health.

In vain, Locke, still inwardly agitated, tries to delude himself in another way with the explicit declaration he makes: “That in denying an *innate law*, he does not at all intend to deny a *natural law*, that is to say, a *law prior to all positive law*.” This is, as you see, a new struggle between conscience and commitment. What, indeed, is this natural law? And if it is neither positive nor innate, where is its basis? Let him point out a single valid argument against the innate law that does not have the same force against the natural law. *The latter*, he tells us, *can be recognized by the light of reason alone, without the aid of positive revelation*. But what then is *the light of reason*? Does it come from men? It is positive; does it come from God? It is innate.

If Locke had been more insightful, or more attentive, or more sincere, instead of saying: *Such an idea is not in the mind of such a people, therefore it is not innate*, he would have said on the contrary: *therefore it is innate for every man who possesses it*; for this is proof that if it does not pre-exist, the senses will never give rise to it, since the nation that lacks it has five senses like any other; and he would have investigated how and why such and such an idea could have been destroyed or distorted in the mind of such a human family. But he was far from such fruitful thought, he who again forgets himself to the point of maintaining *that a single atheist* in the universe would suffice for him to legitimately deny *that the idea of God is innate in man*; that is to say, that a single monstrous child, born without eyes, for example, would prove that sight is not natural to man. But nothing could stop Locke. Didn't he fearlessly tell us that the voice of conscience proves nothing in favor of innate principles, *since everyone can have their own*?

It is a very strange thing that it has never been possible to make this great patriarch, or his unfortunate descendants, understand the difference between ignorance of a law and the errors admitted in its application. An Indian woman sacrifices her newborn child to the goddess *Gonza*, and they say: *Therefore, there is no innate morality*; on the contrary, one must also say: *Therefore, it is innate*; since the idea of duty is strong enough in this unfortunate mother to determine her to sacrifice to this duty the most tender and powerful sentiment in the human heart. Abraham once bestowed immense merit upon himself by committing to this same sacrifice, which he rightly believed to be truly ordained; he said precisely like the Indian woman: *The divinity has spoken; one must close one's eyes and obey*. One, yielding to divine authority, which only wished to test him, obeyed a sacred and direct order; The other, blinded by a deplorable superstition, obeys an imaginary order; but, on both sides, the fundamental idea is the same: it is that of duty, raised to its highest degree. *I must!* This is the innate idea whose

essence is independent of any error in its application. Would the errors that people make every day in their calculations prove, by chance, that they lack the concept of number? Now, if this idea were not innate, they could never acquire it; they could never even err: for to *err* is to deviate from a prior and known rule. The same is true of other ideas; and I add what seems self-evident to me, that, outside of this supposition, it becomes impossible to conceive of *humankind*, that is to say, *the unity* or *the human species*; nor, consequently, any order relating to a given class of intelligent beings.

It must also be admitted that Locke's critics attacked him incorrectly by distinguishing between ideas and considering only first-order moral ideas as *innate*, which seemed to make the solution to the problem dependent on the correctness of these ideas. I am not saying that they do not deserve special attention, and this could be the subject of a second examination; but for the philosopher who considers the question in its full generality, there is no distinction to be made on this point, because there is no idea that is not innate, or foreign to the senses by virtue of the universality from which it derives its form, and by virtue of the intellectual act that *thinks* it.

Every rational doctrine is founded on prior knowledge, for man can learn nothing except because he already knows. Since syllogism and induction always begin with principles posited as already known, it must be admitted that before arriving at a particular truth, we already know it in part. Observe, for example, a real or perceptible triangle: certainly, you were unaware of it before seeing it; however, you already knew, not this particular triangle, but *the* triangle or *triangulation*; and this is how one can know and be unaware of the same thing in different respects. If one rejects this theory, one inevitably falls into the insoluble dilemma of Plato's Meno and is forced to concede either that man can learn nothing, or that all he learns is merely recollection. If one refuses to admit these first ideas, then no demonstration is possible, because there are no longer any principles from which it can be derived. Indeed, the essence of principles is that they be prior, evident, non-derived, indemonstrable, and *causes* in relation to the conclusion; otherwise, they themselves would need to be demonstrated. That is to say, they would cease to be principles, and we would have to admit what the school calls *infinite progress,* which is impossible. Observe further that these principles, which ground demonstrations, must not only be *known* naturally, but *better known* than the truths discovered by means of them: for *everything that communicates something necessarily possesses it in addition to the subject that receives it*. And as, for example, the man we love for the sake of another is always loved less than the latter, so too is every acquired truth less clear to us than the principle that made it visible. Since *the illuminator* is by nature brighter than *the illuminated*, it is not enough to believe in science; one must also believe in the principle of science, whose characteristic is to be both necessary and necessarily believed. For demonstration has nothing in common with external and sensory speech *that denies what it wills*; it pertains to that deeper speech spoken within man, which has no power to contradict the truth. All the sciences communicate with one another through these common principles; and please bear with me carefully that, by this word "*common,"*I intend to express not what these different sciences demonstrate, but what they use to demonstrate; that is to say, the universal, which is the root of all demonstration, which pre-exists all impression or sensory operation, and which is so little the result of experience that, without it, experience will *always* be solitary and could be repeated infinitely, always leaving an abyss between it and the universal. This young dog that is playing with you now played the same way yesterday and the day before. So it played, and played, and played, but not at all, as far as you are concerned, *three times*; for if you remove the fundamental, and consequently pre-existing, idea of *number*, to which experience can refer, *one* and *one* are never anything but *this* and *that*, but never *two*.

You see, gentlemen, that Locke is pitiable with his experience, since truth is only *an equation between the thought of man and the known object*, so that if the first member is not natural, pre-existing and immutable, the other necessarily floats; and there is no longer any truth.

Since every idea is innate in relation to the universal from which it derives its form, it is also entirely foreign to the senses by virtue of the intellectual act of affirmation; for thought or speech (which is the same thing) belongs only to the mind, or, to put it better, is itself the mind, no distinction should be made in this respect between the different orders of ideas. As soon as a person says, "THAT IS IT," they necessarily speak by virtue of an inner and prior knowledge, for the senses have nothing in common with truth, which only the understanding can attain; and since that which does not belong to the senses is foreign to matter, it follows that there is in a person an immaterial principle in which knowledge resides, and since the senses can only receive and transmit impressions to the mind, not only is the function, whose essence is to judge, not aided by these impressions, but it is rather hindered and disturbed by them. We must therefore assume, with the greatest men, that we naturally possess intellectual ideas that have not passed through the senses, and the contrary opinion offends both common sense and religion. I read

that the celebrated *Cudworth*, disputing one day with a friend about the origin of ideas, said to him: " *Take, I pray you, a book from my library, the first one that comes to hand, and open it at random*." The friend came upon Cicero's Offices at the beginning of the first book: " THOUGH *for a year, etc.* " " *That's enough*," replied Cudworth; " *tell me, I beg you, how you could have acquired through the senses the idea of* ' THOUGH.'" The argument was excellent in its very simple form: man cannot speak; he cannot articulate the slightest element of his thought; he cannot say "AND" without refuting Locke.

THE KNIGHT

You told me at the beginning: *Speak to me with complete honesty*. Allow me to say the same to you: *Speak to me with complete honesty*; haven't you chosen the passages from Locke that were most open to criticism? The temptation is seductive when one speaks of a man one dislikes.

THE COUNT

I can assure you the contrary; and I can further assure you that a detailed examination of the book would yield a far more abundant harvest; but to refute one *quarto volume* requires another; and by whom would the latter be read, I ask you? Once a bad book has taken hold of minds, there is no other way to disabuse them than to reveal the general spirit that dictated it; to classify its flaws, to point out only the most salient, and to rely on the conscience of each reader for the rest. To make Locke's book irreproachable in every respect, it would suffice, in my opinion, to change two words. It is entitled: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; let us simply write: *An Essay Concerning Locke's Understanding*: never will a book have better fulfilled its title. The work is a complete portrait of the author, and nothing is lacking. One can easily recognize in him an honest man, even a sensible one, but *one corrupted* by the spirit of a sect that leads him without his realizing it or wanting to realize it; moreover, lacking the most indispensable philosophical erudition and any depth of thought. It is truly comical when he seriously tells us that he took up his pen *to give humankind rules by which a rational creature could wisely direct its actions*; adding that to achieve this goal, *he had decided that the most useful thing would be to first define the limits of the human mind*. Never has anyone *conceived* of anything so foolish; for, first of all, as far as morality is concerned, I would more readily trust the *Sermon on the Mount* than all the scholastic drivel with which Locke has filled his book, and which is quite possibly the most alien thing imaginable to morality. As for the limits of human understanding, rest assured that it is the height of temerity to try to define them; and that the very expression has no precise meaning; but we will speak of this another time, especially since there are many interesting things to say on this point. For now, it suffices to observe that Locke is impressing himself here first and then us. He didn't really mean anything by what he says. He meant to *contradict*, and nothing more. Do you remember that Boindin from The Temple of Taste?

> Shouting: Gentlemen, I am that upright judge
>
> He who always judges, argues, and contradicts.

This was the spirit that animated Locke. An enemy of all moral authority, he resented received ideas, which are a great authority in themselves. Above all, he resented his church, which I would have more right than he to hate, and which I nevertheless venerate in a certain sense, as the most reasonable among those that are wrong. Locke therefore only took up his pen to *argue and contradict*, and his book, purely negative, is one of the many productions born of this same spirit that has spoiled so many talents far superior to Locke's. The other striking, distinctive, and unchanging characteristic of this philosopher is his *superficiality* (allow me to use this word for him); he understands nothing thoroughly, he learns nothing; but what I would especially like to draw your attention to in him as the most decisive sign of mediocrity is his tendency to miss the greatest questions without even realizing it. I can give you a striking example that comes to mind right now. He says somewhere, in a truly priceless, magisterial tone: " *I confess that I have been afflicted with one of those dull souls who have the misfortune not to understand that it is more necessary for the soul to always think than for the body to always be in motion; thought, it seems to me, being to the soul what movement is to the body*." My word! I beg Locke's pardon, but I find nothing in this fine passage to criticize except the joke. Where, then, had he seen matter at rest? You see

that, as I told you just now, he is skirting an abyss without seeing it. I do not claim that movement is essential to matter, and I believe it is above all indifferent to any direction; but ultimately, one must know what one is saying, and when one is not capable of distinguishing absolute movement, one could very well refrain from writing about philosophy.

But see, by following this same comparison which he so poorly grasped, all the advantage that could be derived from it by bringing other perspectives to bear. *Movement is to the body what thought is to the mind*; so, why should there not be a relative thought and an absolute thought? *Relative*, when man finds himself in relation with sensible objects and with his fellow men, and can compare himself to them; *absolute*, when this communication being suspended by sleep or by other irregular causes, thought is *carried away* only by the higher motive which carries everything away. While we rest here quietly in our seats in perfect repose for our senses, we are actually flying through space with a speed that frightens the imagination, since it is at least thirty versts per second, that is to say, it exceeds nearly fifty times that of a cannonball; And this movement is further complicated by the rotational movement, which is roughly equal under the equator, without our having the slightest sensory awareness of these two movements. Now, how can one prove that it is impossible for man to think and move with the higher power without knowing it? It will be very easy to exclaim: " *Oh! That's quite different!"* but perhaps not so easy to prove. Every man, moreover, has his pride, from which it is difficult to completely free himself; I will therefore confess to you naively *that I have been afflicted with a soul heavy enough* to believe that my comparison is no *heavier* than Locke's.

Take this as one of those examples to which others must be related. There is no way to say everything; but you are quite capable of opening Locke's book at random: I undertake without hesitation to show you that he never encountered a single important question that he did not treat with the same mediocrity; and since a mediocre man can thus convince him of his mediocrity, judge what would happen if some superior man took the trouble to *dissect* him.

THE SENATOR

I don't know if you are aware of the problem you are unwittingly creating, because the more criticisms you pile up against Locke's book, the more inexplicable you make its immense reputation seem.

THE COUNT

I am not at all displeased to raise a problem that is not extremely difficult to solve, and since our young friend has thrown me into this discussion, I will gladly end it in favor of the truth.

Who better than I knows the full extent of the authority so unfortunately granted to Locke, and who has ever lamented it in the truest sense? Ah! How I resent this frivolous generation that made him its oracle, and which we still see *imprisoned*, so to speak, in error by the authority of a vain name that it itself created in its folly! How I resent above all those Frenchmen who abandoned, forgot, even outraged the Christian Plato born among them, whose quills Locke was not worthy to sharpen, to yield the scepter of rational philosophy to this idol, *the work of their own hands*, to this false god of the 18th ^{century}, who knows nothing, who says nothing, who can do nothing, and whose pedestal they have raised *before the face of the Lord*, on the word of a few fanatics even worse citizens than bad philosophers! The French, thus degraded by vile schoolteachers who taught them to no longer believe in France, gave the impression of a millionaire sitting on a safe which he refuses to open, and from there extending an ignoble hand to the smiling foreigner.

But let this idolatry not surprise you. The fortune of books would be the subject of a good book. What Seneca said of men is perhaps even truer of the monuments of their minds. *Some have renown, and others deserve it*. If books appear under favorable circumstances, if they stir great passions, if they have on their side the proselytizing fanaticism of a large and active sect, or, what surpasses all, the favor of a powerful nation, their fortune is made; the reputation of books, except perhaps those of mathematicians, depends far less on their intrinsic merit than on these external circumstances, foremost among which, as I have just told you, I place the power of the nation that produced the author. If a man such as Father Kircher, for example, had been born in Paris or London, his bust would be on every mantelpiece, and it would be considered proven that he had seen or glimpsed everything. As long as a book is not, if I may put it this way, *championed* by an influential nation, it will never achieve more than

mediocre success; I could cite a hundred examples. Consider these points, which seem to me undeniably true, and you will see that Locke had every possible advantage in his favor. Let us first speak of his homeland. He was English: England is undoubtedly destined to shine in every era; but let us consider for the moment only the beginning of the 18th century. Then it possessed Newton and was holding Louis XIV back. What a moment for its writers! Locke took advantage of it. However, his inferiority was such that he would not have succeeded, at least not to this extent, if other circumstances had not favored him. The human mind, sufficiently prepared by Protestantism, was beginning to be indignant at its own timidity and was preparing to boldly draw all the consequences of the principles established in the 16th century. Meanwhile, a dreadful sect was beginning to organize itself; it was a stroke of luck for them that a book had been written by a very honest man, and even by a *reasonable Christian.*where all the seeds of the most abject and detestable philosophy were covered by a well-deserved reputation, enveloped in wise forms, and even flanked, if necessary, by some passages from Holy Scripture; the genius of evil could therefore only receive this gift from one of the separate tribes, for the perfidious amalgam would have been, in Jerusalem, either prevented or thwarted by a vigilant and inexorable religion. The book was thus born where it was meant to be born, and sprang from a hand expressly designed to satisfy the most dangerous intentions. Locke rightly enjoyed universal esteem. He called himself a Christian, even wrote in favor of Christianity according to his own strength and prejudices, and the most edifying death had just brought to an end a holy and laborious life. How the conspirators must have rejoiced to see such a man lay down all the principles they needed, and above all, favor materialism *out of a sense of conscience*! They therefore rushed upon the unfortunate *Essay* and championed it with an ardor that is impossible to imagine without having paid close attention. I remember shuddering long ago at the sight of perhaps one of the most hardened atheists who ever lived, recommending to some unfortunate young men the reading of an abridged Locke, *condensed*, so to speak, by an Italian pen that could have been more suited to its vocation. " *Read it*," he told them enthusiastically, " *reread it: learn it by heart*." He would have liked, as Madame de Sévigné said, to *force-feed it to them*. There is a sure rule for judging books as well as people, even without knowing them: it suffices to know *by whom they are loved, and by whom they are hated*. This rule never deceives, and I have already suggested it to you with regard to Bacon. As soon as you see him fashionableized by the Encyclopedists, translated by an atheist, and praised without measure by the torrent of philosophers of the last century, you can be certain, without further examination, that his philosophy is, at least in its general foundations, false and dangerous. Conversely, if you see these same philosophers often perplexed by this writer, and resentful of some of his ideas, seeking to relegate them to obscurity and even daring to boldly mutilate or alter his writings, you can be certain again, and still without further examination, that Bacon's works represent numerous and magnificent exceptions to the general reproaches that can rightfully be leveled against them. Do not believe, however, that I intend to draw any comparison between these two men. Bacon, as a moral philosopher, and even as a writer in a certain sense, will always have a claim to the admiration of connoisseurs; whereas the *Essay on Human Understanding* is most certainly, whether one denies it or agrees with it, the most tedious thing that an absolute lack of genius and style can produce.

If Locke, who was a very honest man, were to return to this world, he would weep bitterly to see his errors, sharpened by the French method, become the shame and misfortune of an entire generation. Do you not see that God has proscribed this vile philosophy, and that He has even seen fit to make the anathema visible? Examine all the books of its followers, and you will not find a single line that taste and virtue deign to recall. It is the death of all religion, of all exquisite feeling, of all sublime impulse: every head of household, above all, must be well warned that by welcoming it into his home, he is truly doing everything he can to drive it out, for no warmth can withstand its icy breath.

But to return to the subject of the fortunes of books, you will explain them precisely like those of men: for both, there is a kind of fortune that is a veritable curse and has nothing to do with merit. Thus, gentlemen, success alone proves nothing. Above all, beware of a very common, very natural, and yet entirely false prejudice: the belief that the great reputation of a book presupposes widespread and well-reasoned knowledge of that same book. This is not the case, I assure you. Since the vast majority judge and can only judge based on hearsay, a rather small number of men initially establish public opinion. They die, and that opinion survives them. New books appear, leaving no time to read the others; and soon these are judged only on a vague reputation, based on a few general characteristics, or on a few superficial and sometimes even completely false analogies. Not long ago, an excellent judge—though one who can only judge what he knows—said in Paris that the ancient talent most resembling Bossuet's was that of Demosthenes. Now, it so happens that these two orators differ as much as two beautiful

things of the same kind (two beautiful flowers, for example) can differ from one another. But all his life, it was said that Demosthenes *thundered*, and Bossuet *thundered* too. Now, since nothing resembles thunder as much as thunder, therefore... etc. This is how judgments are formed. Didn't La Harpe state explicitly that *the object of the entire book of his* Essay on Human Understanding *is to demonstrate rigorously that the understanding is mind and of a nature essentially distinct from matter*? Didn't he say elsewhere: *Locke, Clarke, Leibniz, Fénelon, etc.,* recognized this truth (of the distinction between the two substances)? Could you possibly wish for clearer proof that this celebrated writer hadn't read Locke? And can you even imagine that he would have made the (somewhat comical) mistake of placing him in such good company had he seen him exhaust all the resources of the most quibbled dialectic to somehow attribute thought to matter? You heard Voltaire tell us: " *Locke, with his great sense, keeps repeating to us: Define!"* But, I ask you again, would Voltaire have bestowed this praise upon the English philosopher had he known that Locke is above all eminently ridiculous because of his definitions, which are all nothing but a diluted tautology? This same Voltaire also tells us, in his sacrilegious work, that *Locke is the Pascal of England*. You are not accusing me, I hope, of a blind fondness for *François Arouet.* I will suppose him to be as frivolous, as ill-intentioned, and above all as bad a Frenchman as you wish; however, I would never believe that a man with such taste and tact would have allowed himself this extravagant comparison if he had judged according to his own judgment. What then? The tedious author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, whose merit, in rational philosophy, is reduced to spouting to us, with the eloquence of an almanac, what everyone knows or what no one needs to know, and who would, moreover, be completely unknown in the sciences if he had not discovered that *speed is measured by mass*; such a man, I say, is compared to Pascal—to Pascal! A great man, before the age of thirty; a physicist, a distinguished mathematician, a sublime apologist, a superior polemicist, to the point of making slander entertaining; A profound philosopher, a rare man in short, whose extraordinary qualities could not be overshadowed by any imaginable faults. Such a parallel not only allows us to suppose that Voltaire had read the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* on his own, but also that French men of letters read very little in the last century, firstly because they led a very dissipated life, secondly because they wrote too much, and finally because their pride hardly allowed them to suppose that they needed the thoughts of others. Such men have much more important things to do than read Locke, and I have good reason to suspect that, in general, he has not been read by those who praise him, quote him, and even seem to explain him. It is a great mistake to believe that in order to quote a book, with a fairly strong appearance of speaking about it with knowledge of the facts, one must have read it, at least completely and attentively. We read the passage or line we need; we read a few lines from the *index*; relying on an *index.* We extract the passage we need to support our own ideas; and that, in essence, is all we want: what does the rest matter? There is also an art to getting those who have read to talk; and that is how it is possible that the book most often discussed is in fact the least known through reading. Enough about this great and undeserved reputation: a day will come, and perhaps it is not far off, when Locke will be unanimously placed among the writers who have done the most harm to humankind. Despite all the reproaches I have made against him, I have only touched upon a part of these wrongs, and perhaps the least. After laying the foundations of a philosophy as false as it is dangerous, his fatal mind turned to politics with no less deplorable success. He spoke on the origin of laws as poorly as on that of ideas; and on this point, too, he laid down the principles whose consequences we see today. These terrible seeds might have aborted silently under the ice of his style; animated in the hot mud of Paris, they produced the revolutionary monster that devoured Europe.

Furthermore, gentlemen, I cannot stress enough that the judgment I cannot avoid making on Locke's works does not prevent me from rendering to his person or his memory all the justice that is due to him: he possessed virtues, even great virtues; and although they remind me somewhat of that dancing master, mentioned, I believe, by Dr. Swift, *who had every* imaginable good quality, *except that he was lame*, I nonetheless profess to venerate Locke's moral character; but this is to deplore once again the influence of the *evil principle* on the best minds. It is this principle that has unfortunately reigned in Europe for three centuries; it is this principle that denies everything, that undermines everything, that *protests* against everything: on its bronze brow is written NO! and this is the true title of Locke's book, which in turn can be considered the preface to all of 18th ˉ century philosophy, which is entirely negative and consequently worthless. Read the *Essay*, and you will feel on every page that it was written solely to contradict received ideas, and above all to humiliate an authority that shocked Locke beyond words. He himself told us his secret without mincing words. *He resents a certain kind of people who play the role of masters and doctors, and who hope to make a better deal of men when, through blind* credulity, they can make them SWALLOW innate principles that cannot be disputed. In another part of his book, he examines how men arrive *at what they call their principles*; And he begins with a remarkable observation: *"It may seem strange*," he says, " *and*

yet nothing is less extraordinary, nor better proven by everyday experience, than that doctrines (he really should have named them) *which have no nobler origin than a nurse's superstition or an old woman's authority, eventually grow, in both religion and morality, to the dignity* of principles, *through the passage of time and the compliance of listeners*." This is not about Japan or Canada, much less about rare and extraordinary events: it is about *what every man can see every day of his life*. Nothing could be less ambiguous, as you see; but Locke seems to me to have set the limits of absurdity when he writes in the margin of this fine chapter: " *Whence came the opinion of innate principles?"* One must be *afflicted* with the disease of the 18th century. century, son of the 16th, to attribute to the priesthood the invention of a system, unfortunately perhaps as rare, but certainly still as old as common sense.

One more word about this reputation of Locke that troubled you. Do you believe it to be widespread? Have you counted the votes, or, what is far more important, have you weighed them? If you could disentangle the voice of wisdom from the clamor of ignorance and partisanship, you would already know that *Locke is held in very low esteem as a metaphysician in his own country*; that on the fundamental point of his philosophy, *which, like many others, is riddled with ambiguity and verbiage, he is quite convinced that he has not even understood himself; that his first book (the basis of all the others) is the worst of all; that in the second, he only superficially deals with the operations of the soul; that the whole work is disjointed and pieced together on an ad hoc basis; that his philosophy of the soul is very thin and not worth seriously refuting; that it contains opinions as absurd as they are disastrous in their consequences; that when for young people and even still to a certain extent. That if Locke had lived long enough to see the consequences drawn from his principles, he would have indignantly torn out the guilty pages himself*.

Furthermore, gentlemen, no matter what we say, Locke's authority will be difficult to overturn as long as it is supported by the great powers. In twenty French writings of the last century, I have read: *Locke and Newton!* Such is the privilege of great nations: if the French were to say: *Corneille and Vadé!* or even *Vadé and Corneille!* If euphony, which decides so many things, were kind enough to allow it, I am ready to believe that they would force us to repeat with them: *Vadé and Corneille!*

THE KNIGHT

You grant us great power, my dear friend; I owe you thanks on behalf of my nation.

THE COUNT

I *do not grant* this power, my dear knight, I merely *acknowledge* it: therefore, you owe me no thanks. Moreover, I would wish to have only compliments to offer you on this point; but you are a terrible power! Never, doubtless, was there a nation easier to deceive, nor more difficult to undeceive, nor more powerful in deceiving others. Two particular characteristics distinguish you from all the peoples of the world: the spirit of association and that of proselytism. Your ideas are all national and all passionate. It seems to me that a prophet, with a single stroke of his proud brush, painted you from life, twenty-five centuries ago, when he said: *Every word of this people is a* conspiracy. The electric spark, coursing through a mass of communicating men like the lightning from which it derives, pales in comparison to the instantaneous, I would almost say fulminating, invasion of a taste, a system, a passion among the French, who cannot live *in isolation*. At least, if you acted only upon yourselves, you would be allowed to do so; but the inclination, the need, the fury to act upon others is the most salient trait of your character. One might say that this trait is *you yourself*. Every people has its mission: such is yours. The slightest opinion you hurl at Europe is a battering ram driven by thirty million men. Forever hungry for success and influence, it seems that you live only to satisfy this need; and since a nation cannot have received a destiny separate from the means to accomplish it, you have received this means in your language, by which you reign far more than by your arms, even though they have shaken the world. The dominance of this language does not stem from its current forms; it is as ancient as the language itself. Already in the 13th century, an Italian was writing the history of his homeland in French *because the French language was widespread and more delightful to read and hear than any other*. There are countless examples of this kind. I recall once reading a letter from the renowned architect *Christopher Wren*, in which he examines the dimensions that should be given to a church. He determined them solely by the range of the human voice; which should be so, since preaching has become the principal part of worship, and almost the entirety of worship in churches where sacrifice has ceased. He thus sets its limits, beyond which the voice, to any

English ear, is nothing but noise. *But*, he adds, *a French orator would be heard from farther away, his pronunciation being more distinct and firmer.* What Wren said about spoken language seems to me even truer of that far more penetrating voice that resounds in books. The French voice is always heard from a greater distance; for style is an accent. May this mysterious force, poorly explained until now, and no less powerful for good than for evil, soon become the instrument of a salutary proselytism, capable of consoling humanity for all the harm you have done it!

Meanwhile, Sir, as long as your inconceivable nation remains enamored of Locke, I have no hope of seeing him finally restored to his rightful place of prominence except in England. Since his rivals were the distributors of fame in Europe, the Anglomania that captivated and then ruined them in the last century was extremely useful and honorable to the English, who knew how to profit from it skillfully. Many authors of that nation, such as Young, Richardson, and others, were known and appreciated in Europe only through French translations and recommendations. In Gibbon's memoirs, one reads a letter in which he said, speaking of the novel *Clarissa*: " *It is very bad*." Horace Walpole, later Earl of Oxford, thought of it scarcely more favorably, as I believe I read somewhere in his works. But the eccentric Diderot, lavishing praise in France upon this same Richardson that he would not have bestowed even upon Fénelon, was taken at his word by the English—and rightly so." The French enthusiasm on certain points, which the English themselves, though a party to the debate, judged very differently, will one day be noted. However, as in the study of philosophy, contempt for Locke is the *beginning of wisdom*, the English would conduct themselves in a manner worthy of their character and render a true service to the world if they had the wisdom to shatter a reputation they have no need of. A cedar of Lebanon does not diminish in stature; it is beautified by shaking off a dead leaf.

If they attempt to defend this artificial reputation as they would defend Gibraltar, well then! I withdraw. One would have to be a bit stronger than I am to wage war on Great Britain, already having France on one's hands. Rather than be led in triumph, let us agree, if need be, that Locke's pedestal is unshakeable... E PUR SI MUOVE

But I don't know why, Sir, it's always me you're pursuing, nor why I always let myself be led wherever you want. You've exhausted me completely with your unfortunate Locke. Why don't you do the same to our friend the senator?

THE KNIGHT

Leave it, let me handle it; his turn will come. Besides, he's calmer, more phlegmatic than you. He needs more time to breathe freely; and his reason, for reasons I don't quite understand, impresses me more than yours. So, if I get the urge to tire either of us, I'll more readily side with you. I also believe you owe this flattering distinction to our shared language. Twenty times a day I imagine you're French.

THE SENATOR

How then, my dear knight, do you believe that every Frenchman has the right to tire out another?

THE KNIGHT

No more and no less than one Russian has the right to tire another. But let us save ourselves quickly, I beg you; for I see, glancing at the clock, that in a moment *it will be tomorrow*.

END OF THE SIXTH INTERVIEW

SEVENTH INTERVIEW

THE KNIGHT

For once, Senator, I hope you will speak freely and read us something about the war.

THE SENATOR

I am very ready: for it is a subject I have pondered a great deal. Ever since I started thinking, I have been thinking about war; this terrible subject has seized my attention, and I have never been able to delve into it deeply enough.

The first negative thing I will say about it will no doubt surprise you; but for me it is an undeniable truth: " *Given man's reason, feelings, and affections, there is no way to explain how war is humanly possible*." This is my very considered opinion. La Bruyère describes this great human extravagance somewhere with the energy you know him for. It has been many years since I read this passage; however, I remember it perfectly: he dwells at length on the madness of war; but the madder it is, the less explainable it becomes.

THE KNIGHT

However, it seems to me that before going any further, we could say *that the kings command you and you must march*.

THE SENATOR

Oh! Not at all, my dear knight, I assure you. Whenever a man who isn't entirely foolish presents you with a question as highly problematic after having given it sufficient thought, beware of those sudden solutions that come to the mind of someone who has given it little or no thought: these are usually mere superficial aspects, lacking substance, which explain nothing and do not stand up to reflection. Sovereigns only command effectively and in a lasting way within the bounds of what is accepted by public opinion; and it is not they who define these bounds. In every country, there are things far less revolting than war, which a sovereign would never presume to order. Remember a joke you once made about a nation *that has an academy of sciences, an economic observatory, and an inaccurate calendar*. You added, quite seriously, what you had heard a statesman of this country say: *that he would be far from certain of wanting to innovate on this point; and that under the last government, so distinguished by its liberal ideas* (as we say today), *they had never dared to undertake this change*. You even asked me what I thought of it. In any case, you see that there are subjects far less essential than war, on which the authorities feel they must not compromise; and be careful, I beg you, that it is not a question of explaining the *possibility*, but the *ease* of war. To cut beards, to shorten clothes, Peter I [needed] all the strength of his invincible character: to bring countless legions onto the battlefield, even at the time *when he was being beaten to learn how to fight*, he needed, like all other sovereigns, only to speak. Yet, despite his immense degradation, there remains in man an element of love that draws him toward his fellow human beings: compassion is as natural to him as breathing. By what inconceivable magic is he always ready, at the first beat of the drum, to shed this sacred character and go forth without resistance, often even with a certain glee, which also has its own particular character, to tear to pieces, on the battlefield, his brother who has never offended him, and who advances from his side to inflict the same fate upon him, if he can? I could still understand a national war: but how many wars of this kind are there? One in a thousand years, perhaps: as for the others, especially between civilized nations, which reason and know what they are doing, I declare that I understand nothing of them. One might say: *Glory explains everything,* But first, glory belongs only to leaders; second, it postpones the difficulty: for I ask precisely where this extraordinary glory attached to war comes from. I have often had a vision which I wish to share with you. I imagine that an intelligence, foreign to our world, comes here for some *sufficient* reason and converses with one of us about the order that reigns in this world. Among the curious things that are recounted to him, he is told that the corruption and vices of which he has been thoroughly instructed require that man, in certain circumstances, die by the hand of man; that this right to kill without crime is entrusted, among us, only to the executioner and the soldier. "The former," it will be added, "puts to death the guilty, convicted and condemned, and his executions are fortunately so rare that one of these ministers of death suffices in a province." As for soldiers, there are never enough of them: for they must kill without restraint, and always honest people. Of these two professional *killers*, the soldier and the executioner, one is highly honored, and always has been among all the nations that have inhabited this globe where you have arrived; the other, on the contrary, is just as generally declared infamous; guess, I pray you, upon whom the anathema falls?

Surely the traveling genius would not hesitate for a moment; he would heap upon the executioner all the praise you could not withhold the other day, Count, despite all our prejudices, when you spoke to us of this *gentleman*, as Voltaire called him. "He is a sublime being," he would tell us; "he is the cornerstone of society; since crime has come to dwell in your land, and since it can only be stopped by punishment, remove the executioner from the world, and all order disappears with him. What magnanimity, moreover! What noble selflessness must one not necessarily suppose in the man who devotes himself to functions so undoubtedly respectable, but so arduous and so contrary to your nature! For I have noticed, since I have been among you, that when you are in a cold-blooded state, it pains you to kill a chicken." I am therefore convinced that public opinion surrounds him with all the honor he needs, and which is so rightfully due to him. As for the soldier, he is, all things considered, a minister of cruelties and injustices. How many wars are obviously just? How many are not obviously unjust? How many particular injustices, horrors, and pointless atrocities! I imagine, therefore, that public opinion has very justly heaped as much shame upon the soldier as it has bestowed glory upon the impassive executor of the decrees of sovereign justice.

You know the truth of the matter, gentlemen, and how wrong genius would have been! The soldier and the executioner do indeed occupy the two extremes of the social ladder; but this is in the opposite direction to that fine theory. There is nothing as noble as the former, nothing as abject as the latter: for I will not make a pun by saying that their functions only come closer together by moving further apart; they touch as the first degree in the circle touches the 360th, precisely because there is none further away. The soldier is so noble that he even ennobles what is most ignoble in the public opinion, since he can perform the functions of executioner without debasing himself, provided, however, that he executes only his fellow men, and that, to put them to death, he uses only his weapons.

THE KNIGHT

Ah! What an important point you make, my dear friend! In any country where, for whatever reason one could imagine, someone were to have a soldier execute guilty individuals who did not belong to that rank, in the blink of an eye, and without knowing why, all those rays surrounding the soldier's head would vanish: he would undoubtedly be feared; for any man who, as his usual attire, carries a good rifle with a good lock deserves great attention: but that indefinable charm of honor would have disappeared forever. The officer would no longer be anything as an officer: if he possessed birth and virtue, he could be respected, *despite* his rank, instead of being respected *because* of it; he would ennoble it, instead of being ennobled by it; and, if that rank brought great income, it would have the value of wealth, never that of nobility. But you said, Senator: " *Provided, however, that the soldier only executes his comrades, and that, to kill them, he only uses the weapons of his station*." It should be added: *and provided that it is a military crime*: as soon as it is a question of a vile crime, it is the affair of the executioner.

THE COUNT

Indeed, this is the custom. Since ordinary courts have jurisdiction over civil crimes, soldiers guilty of such offenses are handed over to them. However, if the sovereign were to decree otherwise, I am far from certain that the soldier's character would be damaged; but we are all three in complete agreement on the other two conditions; and we have no doubt that this character would be irrevocably tarnished if the soldier were forced to shoot an ordinary citizen, or to put his comrade to death by fire or hanging. To maintain the honor and discipline of a corps or any association, privileged rewards are less effective than privileged punishments: the Romans, the most sensible and warlike people of antiquity, had conceived a singular idea regarding military punishments of mere correction. Believing that discipline was impossible without a stick, yet unwilling to degrade either the one who struck or the one who was struck, they devised a way to consecrate military caning: for this purpose, they chose a wood, the most useless of all for everyday purposes, *the vine*, and they designated it solely for punishing soldiers. The vine, in the centurion's hand, was the symbol of his authority and the instrument of non-capital corporal punishment. Caning, in general, was a punishment sanctioned by law among the Romans, but no non-military man could be struck with the vine, and no other wood than that of the vine could be used to strike a soldier. I don't know why some similar idea hasn't occurred to any modern sovereign. If I were consulted on this matter, my thoughts would not lead me back to the vine; for servile imitations are worthless: I would propose the laurel.

THE KNIGHT

Your idea delights me, all the more so as I believe it very likely to be implemented. I assure you, I will gladly present to His Majesty the plan for a vast greenhouse to be established in the capital, dedicated exclusively to producing the laurel necessary to supply disciplinary rods to all the junior officers of the Russian army. This greenhouse would be under the supervision of a general officer, a Knight of St. George, at least of the second class, who would hold the title of *High Inspector of the Laurel Greenhouse*: the plants could only be tended, pruned, and worked by elderly invalids of impeccable reputation. The model for the rods, which would all be rigorously identical, would be kept in the War Office in a silver-gilt case; each rod would be suspended from the junior officer's buttonhole by a St. George ribbon, and on the greenhouse's pediment, one would read: " *It is my wood that produces my leaves*." In truth, this nonsense wouldn't be stupid at all. The only thing that bothers me a little is that the corporals...

THE SENATOR

My young friend, however much genius one may have and whatever country one may be from, it is impossible to improvise a *Code* without breathing and without making a single mistake, even if it were only the *Code of the wand*; so, while you think about it a little more maturely, allow me to continue.

Although the military is inherently dangerous to the well-being and liberties of any nation, for the motto of that state will always be more or less that of Achilles: *Jura nego mihi nata*; nevertheless, the nations most jealous of their liberties have never thought differently from the rest of humanity about the preeminence of the military state; and antiquity on this point did not think differently from us: it is one of those matters on which people have been constantly in agreement and always will be. Here, then, is the problem I propose to you: *Explain why what is most honorable in the world, in the judgment of all humankind without exception, is the right to innocently shed innocent blood?* Look at it closely, and you will see that there is something mysterious and inexplicable in the extraordinary value that people have always attached to military glory; especially since, if we listened only to theory and human reasoning, we would be led to directly opposing ideas. It is therefore not a matter of explaining the possibility of war by the glory that surrounds it; it is a matter of explaining that glory itself, which is no easy task. I would also like to share another idea on the same subject. We have been told a thousand times that nations, being in a state of nature in relation to one another, can only settle their disputes through war. But, since I am in a questioning mood today, I will ask again: *Why have all nations remained respectively in the state of nature, without ever making a single attempt, a single effort, to leave it?* According to the foolish doctrines with which our youth was lulled, there was a time when men did not live in society; and this imaginary state was ridiculously called *the state of nature*. It is added that men, having learnedly weighed the advantages of the two states, decided on the one we see...

THE COUNT

Would you allow me to interrupt you for a moment to share a thought that has occurred to me regarding this doctrine, which you so rightly call *mad*? The savage clings so tightly to his most brutal habits that nothing can dissuade him from them. You have no doubt seen, at the beginning of the *Discourse on the Inequality of Conditions*, the engraving based on the anecdote, true or false, of the Hottentot returning to his equals. Rousseau could hardly have imagined that this frontispiece was a powerful argument against the book. The savage sees our arts, our laws, our sciences, our luxury, our refinement, our pleasures of every kind, and above all our superiority, which he cannot conceal and which might, however, stir some desires in hearts susceptible to it; but all this does not tempt him at all, and *he constantly returns to his equals*. If, therefore, the modern-day Savage, aware of both states and able to compare them daily in certain countries, remains steadfast in his own, how could the primitive Savage have deliberately departed from it to enter another state of which he had no knowledge? Therefore, society is as old as humankind, and therefore the savage is, and can only be, a degraded and punished human being. Truly, I see nothing so clear to common sense, which avoids sophistry.

THE SENATOR

You're preaching to the choir, as the saying goes; I thank you nonetheless for your reflection: one can never have too many weapons against error. But to return to what I was saying earlier, if humankind has passed *from the state of nature*, in the common sense of the word, to the state of civilization, whether by deliberation or *by chance* (I'm still speaking the language of fools), why haven't nations possessed as much intelligence or as much happiness as individuals? And why have they never agreed upon a general society to end the quarrels of nations, just as they agreed upon national sovereignty to end those of individuals? People may well ridicule *the impractical peace of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre* (for I agree that it is impractical), but I ask why. I ask why nations have been unable to rise to the social state like individuals, why reasoning Europe in particular has never attempted anything of this kind? I address this same question especially to believers with even greater confidence: how could God, who is the author of the society of individuals, not have allowed humankind, his beloved creature, who has received the divine character of perfectibility, to at least try to rise to the society of nations? Every conceivable reason for establishing that this society is impossible will likewise argue against the society of individuals. The argument drawn primarily from the impractical universality that would have to be given to a great sovereignty would have no force: for it is false that it should encompass the universe. Nations are sufficiently classified and divided by rivers, by seas, by mountains, by religions, and especially by languages, which have varying degrees of affinity. And when a number of nations alone were to agree to transition to *a state of civilization*, that would already be a step forward for humanity. The other nations, it will be said, would fall upon them: oh! what does it matter? They would always be more peaceful among themselves and stronger in their dealings with others, which is sufficient. Perfection is not at all necessary on this point: it would already be a great deal to approach it, and I cannot persuade myself that nothing of this kind would ever have been attempted without some hidden and terrible law that requires human blood.

THE COUNT

You consider it an indisputable fact that this *civilization of nations* has never been attempted: it is nevertheless true that it has been attempted often, and even persistently; admittedly without knowing what one was doing, which was a circumstance very favorable to success, and indeed, one came very close to succeeding, at least as far as the imperfection of our nature allows. But humankind was mistaken: they took one thing for another, and everything failed, by virtue, according to all appearances, of that hidden and terrible law of which you speak.

THE SENATOR

I would ask you a few questions, were I not afraid of losing my train of thought. Please observe a phenomenon that is quite worthy of your attention: the profession of war, contrary to what one might believe or fear, if experience did not teach us, does not in any way tend to degrade, to make ferocious or harsh, at least not the one who practices it; on the contrary, it tends to perfect him. The most honest man is usually the honest soldier, and, for my part, I have always made a special case, as I told you recently, of military common sense. I infinitely prefer it to the convoluted maneuvers of businessmen. In the ordinary course of life, soldiers are more amiable, easier to get along with, and often, it has seemed to me, more obliging than other men. In the midst of political storms, they generally prove to be intrepid defenders of ancient maxims; And the most dazzling sophisms almost always fail before their integrity: they readily concern themselves with useful matters and knowledge, political economy, for example. Perhaps the only work that antiquity has left us on this subject is by a military man, Xenophon; and the first work of the same kind to make an impact in France is also by a military man, Marshal Vauban. Religion among them is remarkably intertwined with honor; and even if it had cause to make serious reproaches about their conduct, they would not refuse it their sword, should it be needed. Much is said about the *licentiousness of the camps*: it is undoubtedly great, but the soldier generally does not find these vices in the camps; he brings them there. A moral and austere people always produces excellent soldiers, formidable only on the battlefield. Virtue, even piety, are very well allied with military courage; far from weakening the warrior, they exalt him. Saint Louis's hair shirt didn't bother him under his breastplate. Voltaire himself sincerely agreed that an army ready to die to obey God would be invincible. Racine's letters have no doubt taught you that, when he followed Louis XIV's army in 1691 as France's historiographer, he never attended Mass in the camp without seeing some musketeer receiving communion with the greatest edification.

Look in Fénelon's spiritual works for the letter he wrote to a friend, an officer. Despairing at not having been assigned to the army as he had flattered himself he would be, this man had been led, probably by Fénelon himself, down the path of the highest perfection: he had reached *the point of pure love* and *the death of the Mystics*. Now, do you perhaps believe that the tender and loving soul of the *Swan of Cambrai* will find compensation for his friend in the scenes of carnage in which he will have no part; that he will say to him: " *After all, you are fortunate; you will not see the horrors of war and the appalling spectacle of all the crimes it engenders"?* He is careful not to utter such sentimental words; on the contrary, he consoles him and grieves with him. He sees in this deprivation an overwhelming misfortune, a bitter cross, perfectly suited to detach him from the world.

And what shall we say of that other officer, to whom Madame Guyon wrote that he should not worry if he sometimes happened to miss Mass on weekdays, *especially in the army*? The writers from whom we have these anecdotes lived, however, in a rather warlike century, it seems to me: but that is because nothing in this world harmonizes like the religious spirit and the military spirit.

THE KNIGHT

I am far from contradicting this truth; however, it must be agreed that if virtue does not spoil military courage, it can at least do without it: for we have seen, at certain times, legions of atheists obtain prodigious successes.

THE SENATOR

Why not, I ask you, if these atheists were fighting others? But allow me to continue. Not only does the military profession generally align very well with human morality, but, what is quite extraordinary, it in no way weakens those gentle virtues that seem most opposed to the profession of arms. The gentlest characters love war, desire it, and wage it with passion. At the first signal, this amiable young man, raised in the horror of violence and bloodshed, leaps from his father's house and runs, weapons in hand, to seek on the battlefield what he calls *the enemy*, without yet knowing what an *enemy* is. Yesterday he would have been in trouble if he had accidentally crushed his sister's canary; tomorrow, you will see him climbing onto a pile of corpses, *to see from further away*, as Charron used to say. The blood flowing from all sides only incites him to shed his own and that of others: he is inflamed by degrees, and he will come to *the enthusiasm of carnage*.

THE KNIGHT

You are not exaggerating: before my twenty-fourth year had passed, I had seen three times *the enthusiasm of carnage*: I experienced it myself and I especially remember a terrible moment when I would have put an entire army to the sword, if I had had the power.

THE SENATOR

But if, at this very moment, you were offered the chance to seize the white dove with the composure of a cook, and then...

THE KNIGHT

Oh dear! You break my heart!

THE SENATOR

This is precisely the phenomenon I was speaking of earlier. The appalling spectacle of carnage does not harden the true warrior. Amidst the blood he sheds, he is as human as a wife is chaste in the throes of love. As soon as he sheathes his sword, sacred humanity reasserts itself, and perhaps the most exalted and generous sentiments are found among soldiers. Remember, Sir, the great century of France. Then, religion, valor, and science, having been brought, so to speak, into equilibrium, resulted that fine character which all peoples hailed with unanimous acclamation as the model of the European character. Separate the first element, and the whole—that is to say, all its

beauty—vanishes. It is not sufficiently noted how essential this element is to everything, and the role it plays even where superficial observers might consider it foreign. The divine spirit, which had rested particularly upon Europe, softened even the scourges of eternal justice, and the *European war* will forever be marked in the annals of the universe. People killed each other, no doubt, burned, ravaged, and even committed, if you will, a thousand and one senseless crimes, but nevertheless, the war began in May; it ended in December; people slept under canvas; soldiers fought only soldiers. Nations were never truly at war, and all that is weak was sacred amidst the grim scenes of this devastating scourge.

It was, however, a magnificent spectacle to see all the sovereigns of Europe, restrained by some imperious moderation, never demanding from their people, even in moments of great peril, all that could possibly be obtained from them: they used man gently, and all, guided by an invisible force, avoided striking down upon the enemy sovereignty any of those blows *that can rebound*: glory, honor, eternal praise to the law of love proclaimed ceaselessly in the heart of Europe! No nation triumphed over another: ancient warfare existed only in books or among peoples *seated in the shadow of death*; a province, a city, often even a few villages, ended bitter wars by changing hands. Mutual respect, the most refined politeness, knew how to show themselves amidst the din of arms. Bombs, in the air, avoided the palaces of kings; Dances and spectacles often served as interludes between battles. The enemy officer, invited to these festivities, would come and joke about the battle to be fought the next day; and even amidst the horrors of the bloodiest melee, the dying man's ear could hear the accent of pity and the formulas of courtesy. At the first signal of battle, vast hospitals sprang up on all sides: medicine, surgery, and pharmacy brought their numerous practitioners; among them rose the genius of *Saint John of God* and *Saint Vincent de Paul*, greater and stronger than man, constant as faith, active as hope, and skillful as love. All the living victims were gathered, treated, and comforted: every wound was touched by the hand of science and by that of charity!... You spoke just now, Monsieur le Chevalier, of legions of *atheists* who have achieved prodigious successes: I believe that if we could regiment tigers, we would see even greater wonders: Christianity, if you look at it closely, will never appear to you more sublime, more worthy of God, and more suited to humankind than to war. When you say, moreover, *legions of atheists*, you don't mean it literally; but suppose these legions to be as evil as they can be, do you know how we could fight them most effectively? It would be by opposing them with the principle diametrically opposed to the one that formed them. Be quite certain that legions *of atheists* would not stand against *thundering legions*.

Finally, gentlemen, the soldier's duties are terrible; but they must stem from a great law of the spiritual world, and it should come as no surprise that all nations of the universe have agreed to see in this scourge something more particularly divine than in others; believe me, it is not without great and profound reason that the title GOD OF ARMS shines on every page of Holy Scripture. Guilty mortals, and wretched, because we are guilty! It is we who make all physical evils necessary, but especially war: men usually blame their sovereigns, and nothing is more natural: Horace said, jokingly:

> The people are punished for the madness of kings.

But J.-B. Rousseau said, with greater gravity and true philosophy:

> It is the wrath of kings that makes the earth arm itself.
>
> It is the wrath of Heaven that makes kings arm themselves.

Observe further that this already terrible law of war is nevertheless only one chapter of the general law that weighs upon the universe.

In the vast realm of living nature, a manifest violence reigns, a kind of prescribed rage that arms all beings *in mutual death*: as soon as you leave the insensible realm, you find the decree of violent death written on the very borders of life. Already, in the plant kingdom, one begins to feel the law: from the immense catalpa to the humblest grass, how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*! But as soon as you enter the animal kingdom, the law suddenly takes on a terrifying clarity. A force, both hidden and palpable, is continually occupied in exposing the

principle of life by violent means. In each major division of the animal species, it has chosen a certain number of animals that it has charged with devouring the others: thus there are predatory insects, predatory reptiles, predatory birds of prey, and predatory quadrupeds. There is not a moment in time when one living being is not devoured by another.

Above these many animal races is placed man, whose destructive hand spares nothing that lives; he kills to eat, he kills to clothe himself, he kills to adorn himself, he kills to attack, he kills to defend himself, he kills to learn, he kills for amusement, he kills for the sake of killing: a superb and terrible king, he needs everything, and nothing can resist him. He knows how many barrels of oil the heads of sharks and sperm whales will provide him with; his nimble pin pierces the museum's cardboard display of the elegant butterfly he has captured on the summit of Mont Blanc or Chimboraço; he stuffs the crocodile; he embalms the hummingbird; at his command, the rattlesnake comes to die in the preservative liquid that will show it intact to a long line of observers. The horse that carries its master to the tiger hunt struts beneath the skin of that same animal; Man demands everything at once: from the lamb its entrails to make a harp resonate, from the whale its baleen to support the young virgin's corset, from the wolf its most deadly tooth to polish the delicate works of art, from the elephant its tusks to fashion a child's toy: his tables are covered with corpses. The philosopher can even discover how this perpetual carnage is foreseen and ordained in the grand scheme of things. But will this law stop with man? Probably not. However, what being will exterminate the one who will exterminate them all? He. It is man who is charged with slaughtering man. But how can he fulfill the law, he who is a moral and merciful being; he who was born to love; he who weeps for others as for himself, who finds pleasure in weeping, and who ends up inventing fictions to make himself weep? He, finally, to whom it has been declared *that every last drop of blood he unjustly shed will be demanded*? It is war that will fulfill the *decree*. Do you not hear the *earth* crying out and demanding blood? The blood of animals is not enough for it, nor even that of the guilty, shed by the sword of the law. If human justice struck them all, there would be no war; but it can only reach a small number, and often it even spares them, without suspecting that its ferocious humanity contributes to necessitating war, especially if, at the same time, another blindness, no less stupid and no less fatal, were working to extinguish expiation in the world. The earth has not cried out in vain: war is kindled. Man is suddenly seized by a *divine fury.* A stranger to hatred and anger, man advances onto the battlefield without knowing what he wants or even what he is doing. What then is this horrible enigma? Nothing is more contrary to his nature, and nothing less repugnant to him: he enthusiastically does what he abhors. Have you never noticed that, on the field of death, a man never disobeys? He may well massacre Nerva or Henry IV; but the most abominable tyrant, the most insolent butcher of human flesh, will never hear there: " *We no longer wish to serve you*." A revolt on the battlefield, an agreement to embrace while renouncing a tyrant, is a phenomenon that does not occur to me. Nothing resists, nothing can resist the force that drags man into combat; an innocent murderer, a passive instrument of a fearsome hand, *he plunges headlong into the abyss he himself has dug. He gives, he receives death without suspecting that it is he who has caused death* 26.

Thus, from the mite to man, the great law of the violent destruction of living beings is constantly fulfilled. The entire earth, continually soaked in blood, is but an immense altar where all that lives must be sacrificed endlessly, without measure, without respite, until the consumption of things, until the death of death.

But the anathema must strike humanity more directly and visibly: the exterminating angel revolves like the sun around this unfortunate globe, allowing one nation to breathe only to strike others. But when crimes, and especially crimes of a certain kind, have accumulated to a significant point, the angel hastens his tireless flight without measure. Like a rapidly spinning, burning torch, the immense speed of his movement makes him present at once at every point of his dreaded orbit. He strikes all the peoples of the earth at the same instant; at other times, the minister of precise and infallible vengeance, he focuses his fury on certain nations and bathes them in blood. Do not expect them to make any effort to escape their judgment or to hasten it. One can almost see these great criminals, enlightened by their conscience, asking for punishment and accepting it in order to find expiation. As long as they have blood left, they will come to offer it; and soon a *rare generation of young people* will hear about these devastating wars produced by the crimes of their fathers.

War is therefore divine in itself, since it is a law of the world.

War is divine in its supernatural consequences, both general and specific; consequences little known because they are little studied, but nonetheless undeniable. Who could doubt that death in battle holds great privileges? And who could believe that the victims of this dreadful judgment shed their blood in vain? But now is not the time to

dwell on such matters; our century is not yet ready to concern itself with them: let us leave it to its physics, and yet let us always keep our eyes fixed on that invisible world which will explain everything.

War is divine in the mysterious glory that surrounds it, and in the no less inexplicable attraction that draws us to it.

War is divine in the protection granted to great captains, even the most reckless, who are rarely struck down in battles, and only when their fame can no longer grow and their mission is fulfilled.

War is divine in the manner in which it is declared. I do not wish to excuse anyone unjustly; but how often those considered the immediate instigators of wars are themselves swept along by circumstances! At the precise moment brought about by men and ordained by justice, God advances to avenge the iniquity that the inhabitants of the world have committed against him. *The earth, thirsting for blood*, as we heard a few days ago, *opens its mouth to receive it and hold it within its bosom until the moment it must give it up*. Let us therefore applaud as much as we wish the estimable poet who exclaims:

At the slightest divisive interest

These thunderous majesties,

Bellona carries the answer.

And always the saltpeter announces

Their murderous intentions.

But let these very inferior considerations not prevent us from raising our gaze higher.

War is divine in its results, which utterly defy the speculations of human reason: for they can be entirely different between two nations, even if the war's impact has been equal on both sides. There are wars that degrade nations, and degrade them for centuries; others exalt them, perfect them in every way, and even, remarkably, replace temporary losses with a visible increase in population. History often shows us the spectacle of a rich and growing population amidst the most deadly battles; but there are vicious wars, wars of curses, which conscience recognizes far better than reason: nations are mortally wounded by them, both in their power and in their character. then you can see the victor even degraded, impoverished and groaning amidst his sad laurels, while, on the lands of the vanquished, you will not find, after a few moments, a workshop, not a plow that requires a man.

War is divine by virtue of the indefinable force that determines its success. Surely, my dear knight, you repeated the other day the famous maxim that *God is always on the side of the large battalions*. I will never believe that it truly belongs to the great man to whom it is attributed; it may well be that he put forward this maxim in jest, or seriously in a limited but very true sense; for God, in the temporal governance of his providence, does not deviate (except in the case of miracles) from the general laws he has established forever. Thus, as two men are stronger than one, one hundred thousand men must have more strength and influence than fifty thousand. When we ask God for victory, we are not asking him to deviate from the general laws of the universe; that would be too extravagant; but these laws combine in a thousand ways and can be overcome to a degree that cannot be assigned. Three men are undoubtedly stronger than one: the general proposition is undeniable; but a skilled man can take advantage of certain circumstances, and a single Horatius will kill the three Curiatii. *A body with more mass than another has more movement.* Undoubtedly, if the speeds are equal; but it is the same to have three in mass and two in speed, or three in speed and two in mass. Similarly, an army of 40,000 men is physically inferior to another army of 60,000: but if the former has more courage, experience, and discipline, it can defeat the latter; for it has more action with less mass, and this is what we see on every page of history. Wars, moreover, always presuppose a certain equality; otherwise, there is no war. I have never read that the Republic of Ragusa declared war on the sultans, nor that of Geneva on the kings of France. There is always a certain equilibrium in the political universe, and it is not even within man's power to break it (except in certain rare, specific, and limited cases). This is why coalitions are so difficult: if they were not, since politics is so little governed by justice, people would assemble every day to destroy a power; but these projects rarely succeed, and even the weak escape them with an ease that is astonishing in history. When an overly dominant power terrifies the world, people become irritated at finding no

way to stop it; they hurl bitter reproaches at the selfishness and immorality of the cabinets that prevent them from uniting to avert the common danger: this was the cry heard in the heyday of Louis XIV; but, in essence, these complaints are unfounded. A coalition between several sovereigns, formed on the principles of pure and selfless morality, would be a miracle. God, who owes it to no one, and who makes none useless, employs two simpler means to restore the balance: sometimes the giant slaughters himself, sometimes a much inferior power throws an imperceptible obstacle in his path, but which then grows in some unknown way, and becomes insurmountable; like a weak branch, stopped in the current of a river, finally produces a silting up which diverts it.

Starting, then, from the hypothesis of equilibrium, at least approximate, which always exists, either because the belligerent powers are equal, or because the weaker ones have allies, how many unforeseen circumstances can disrupt this equilibrium and cause the greatest projects to fail or succeed, despite all the calculations of human prudence! Four centuries before our era, geese saved the Capitoline Hill; nine centuries later, under the Emperor Arnuf, Rome was taken by a hare. I doubt that either side counted on such allies or feared such enemies. History is full of these inconceivable events that confound even the most sophisticated speculations. If you take a broader look at the role that moral power plays in war, you will agree that nowhere is the divine hand felt more keenly by humankind: it seems to be a *domain* —if you'll pardon the expression—whose direction Providence has reserved for itself, and in which it allows humankind to act only in an almost mechanical way, since success there depends almost entirely on what depends least on them. Never is one more frequently and more keenly aware than in war of one's own insignificance and of the inevitable power that governs everything. It is opinion that loses battles, and it is opinion that wins them. *The intrepid Spartan sacrificed himself to fear* (Rousseau expresses surprise at this somewhere, I don't know why); Alexander also sacrificed himself to fear before the Battle of Arbela. Indeed, those people were quite right, and to correct this sensible devotion, it suffices to pray to *God that He deign not to send us fear*. Fear! Charles V playfully mocked this epitaph he read in passing: *"Here lies he who was never afraid*." And what man has never been afraid in his life? Who has not had occasion to admire, both in himself and in history, the all-powerful weakness of this passion, which often seems to have more dominion over us the fewer reasonable motives it has? *Let us pray, then*, Sir, for *it is to you, if you please, that this discourse is addressed*, since it is you who have called for these reflections; let us pray to God with all our might that He remove from us and our friends the fear that is at His command, and that can ruin in an instant the finest military strategies.

And do not be alarmed by the word " *fear"*; for if you were to take it in its strictest sense, you might say that the thing it expresses is rare, and that it is shameful to fear it. There is a woman's fear that makes her flee screaming; and that one, it is permitted, even commanded, not to consider possible, although it is not entirely an unknown phenomenon. But there is another, far more terrible fear, which descends into the most manly heart, freezes it, and persuades it that it is defeated. This is the dreadful scourge that always hangs over armies. I once asked this question of a high-ranking officer, whom you both know. " *Tell me, General, what is a lost battle? I have never quite understood that*." After a moment of silence, he replied, " *I don't know*." And after a second silence, he added, " *It is a battle that one believes one has lost*." Nothing could be truer. A man fighting another is defeated when he is killed or felled, while the other remains standing; this is not the case with two armies: one cannot be killed, while the other remains standing. Forces are balanced, as are the dead, and especially since the invention of gunpowder has made the means of destruction more equal, a battle is no longer lost materially; that is to say, because there are more dead on one side than the other. Thus, Frederick II, who knew a thing or two about such matters, said: " *To conquer is to advance*." But who is it that advances? It is the one whose conscience and composure force the other to retreat. Remember, Count, that young soldier you knew personally, who once described to you, in one of his letters, *that solemn moment when, without knowing why, an army feels itself carried forward, as if gliding down an inclined plane*. I recall that you were struck by this phrase, which indeed perfectly expresses the decisive moment; but this moment completely eludes reflection, and above all, be warned that numbers are in no way a factor in this matter. Has the soldier *who is sliding forward* counted the dead? Public opinion is so powerful in war that it can change the nature of the same event and give it two different names for no other reason than its own whim. A general throws himself between two enemy forces and writes to his court: " *I have cut him off, he is lost*." This one writes to his: " *He has placed himself between two fires, he is lost*." Which of the two has erred? He who allows himself to be seized by the *cold goddess.* Assuming all circumstances, and especially that of numbers, are at least approximately equal on both sides, show me a difference between the two positions that is not purely moral. The term "to *turn"* is also one of those expressions that public opinion *twists* in war as it sees fit. There is nothing so well known as the reply of that Spartan woman to her son who complained of having a sword that was too short: " *Take a step forward*." But if the young man had been able to make himself

heard from the battlefield and shout to his mother, " *I've been turned*," the noble Lacedaemonian woman would not have failed to reply, " *Turn around*." It is imagination that loses battles.

It's not always even on the day they are fought that we know whether they are won or lost: it's the next day, often two or three days later. We talk a lot about battles around the world without really knowing what they are; we are especially prone to consider them as mere points, whereas they cover two or three leagues of land. We are told gravely: "How can you not know what happened in that battle since you were there?" when precisely the opposite could often be said. Does the man on the right know what is happening on the left? Does he even know what is happening two steps away from him? I can easily picture one of these dreadful scenes: on a vast field covered with all the trappings of carnage, and which seems to tremble beneath the hooves of men and horses; amidst the fire and swirling smoke; Dazed, transported by the resounding gunfire and military instruments, by voices that command, that roar, or that fade away; surrounded by the dead, the dying, the mutilated corpses; possessed by turns by fear, by hope, by rage, by five or six different intoxications, what becomes of the man? What does he see? What does he know after a few hours? What power does he have over himself and over others? Among this multitude of warriors who have fought all day, there is often not a single one, not even the general, who knows where the victor lies. It would be entirely up to me to cite modern battles, famous battles whose memory will never perish, battles that changed the face of affairs in Europe, and which were lost only because this or that man believed they were lost; So that, assuming all circumstances were equal, and not a drop more blood shed on either side, another general would have had the *Te Deum* sung at home, and forced history to say the exact opposite of what it will say. But, please, in what era has moral power played a more astonishing role in war than in our own time? Is it not truly magical, all that we have seen in the last twenty years? It is doubtless the men of this era who should exclaim:

> And what time was ever more fertile in miracles?

But, without straying from the subject at hand, is there, in this category, a single event contrary to the most obvious calculations of probability that we haven't seen occur despite all the efforts of human prudence? Haven't we even ended up seeing battles won lost? Furthermore, gentlemen, I don't wish to exaggerate, for you know I have a particular aversion to exaggeration, which is the lie of honest people. If you find any exaggeration in what I have just said, I will pass judgment without argument, all the more readily since I have no need to be right in the strictest sense of the term. I generally believe that battles are neither won nor lost physically. This proposition, being in no way rigid, lends itself to any restrictions you deem appropriate, provided you grant me in turn (which no sensible person can dispute) that moral power has an immense influence in war, which is sufficient for me. Let us therefore speak no more of *large battalions*, Sir; for there is no idea more false and more egregious, unless it is restricted in the sense I believe I have explained quite clearly.

THE COUNT

Your country, Senator, was not saved by *large battalions* when, at the beginning of the 17th century, Prince Pajarski and a cattle merchant named Mignin delivered it from an unbearable yoke. The honest merchant pledged his possessions and those of his friends, pointing to the sky, to Pajarski, who promised his arm and his blood: they began with a thousand men, and they succeeded.

THE SENATOR

I am delighted that this detail has occurred to you; but the history of all nations is filled with similar events that show how the power of numbers can be produced, amplified, weakened, or nullified by a multitude of circumstances beyond our control. As for our *Te Deums*, so numerous and often so misplaced, I entrust them to you wholeheartedly, Sir. If God were like us, they would attract thunderbolts; but He knows what we are, and treats us according to our ignorance. Moreover, although there are abuses in this matter, as in all human affairs, the general custom is nonetheless holy and praiseworthy.

We must always ask God for success, and we must always thank Him for it; now, since nothing in this world depends more immediately on *God than war*; since He has restricted man's natural power in this matter, and since

He likes to call Himself the God of war, there are all sorts of reasons for us to redouble our vows when we are struck by this terrible scourge; and it is also with great reason that Christian nations have tacitly agreed, when their arms have been successful, to express their gratitude to the *God of armies* by a *Te Deum*; for I do not believe that, to thank Him for the victories which we owe only to Him, it is possible to use a more beautiful prayer: it belongs to your Church, Count.

THE COUNT

Yes, it was born in Italy, it seems; and the title " *Ambrosian Hymn"* might lead one to believe that it belongs exclusively to Saint Ambrose. However, it is quite generally believed, based on mere tradition, that the Te Deum was, if one may put it this way, *improvised* in Milan by the two great and holy doctors, Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, in a fit of religious fervor; an opinion that is entirely plausible. Indeed, this inimitable hymn, preserved and translated by your Church and by the Protestant denominations, shows not the slightest trace of work or meditation, is not a *composition*, it is an *outpouring*; it is a burning poem, free from all meter; it is a divine dithyramb where enthusiasm, flying on its own wings, scorns all the resources of the air. I doubt that faith, love, and gratitude have ever spoken in a truer and more penetrating language.

THE KNIGHT

You remind me of what you told us in our last conversation about the intrinsic nature of different prayers. It's a subject I'd never considered before; and you've inspired me to give *a course on prayer*: it will be a scholarly endeavor, since all nations have prayed.

THE COUNT

This will be a very interesting course, and not one of pure erudition. You will find along the way a host of interesting observations; for the prayer of each nation is a kind of indicator that shows us with mathematical precision the moral standing of that nation. The Hebrews, for example, sometimes gave God the name of *Father*: even the Pagans made great use of this title. But when it comes to prayer, it is another matter: you will not find in all of secular antiquity, nor even in the Old Testament, a single example of man giving God the title of *Father* when speaking to Him in prayer. Why, moreover, did the people of antiquity, strangers to the revelation of Moses, never know how to express repentance in their prayers? They had remorse like us, since they had a conscience: their great criminals roamed the earth and the seas to find expiations and expiators; they sacrificed to all the angry gods; They perfumed themselves, they bathed themselves in water and blood; but their *contrite hearts* were never seen; they never knew how to ask forgiveness in their prayers. Ovid, after a thousand others, was able to put these words in the mouth of the outraged man who forgives the guilty one: " *Non quia tu dignus, sed quia mitis ego" (Not because you are worthy, but because of my misfortune)*; but no ancient author was able to place these same words in the mouth of the guilty one speaking to God. We seem to be translating Ovid in the liturgy of the Mass when we say: " *Non aestimator meriti, sed veniæ largitor admitte* " (Not to be envious of merit, but to be enlarged by the coming of the great one); and yet we are saying what all humankind has never been able to say without revelation; for humankind knew well that it could *anger* God or *a god, but not that it could offend* Him. The words " *crime"* and " *criminal"* belong to all languages: those of *"sin"* and " *sinner"* belong only to the Christian language. For a similar reason, man has always been able to call God *father*, which only expresses a relationship of creation and power; but no man, by his own strength, has been able to say *my father!* for this is a relationship of love, foreign even to Mount Sinai, and which belongs only to Calvary.

One more observation: the barbarity of the Hebrew people is one of the favorite theses of the 18th century; it is not permissible to grant this people any knowledge whatsoever: they did not know the slightest physical or astronomical truth; for them, the earth was merely a *flat surface* and the sky a *canopy*; their language derives from another, and none derives from it; they had neither philosophy, nor arts, nor literature; never before a very late period did foreign nations have the slightest knowledge of the books of Moses; and it is quite false that the truths of a higher order found scattered among the ancient writers of Paganism derive from this source. Let us grant everything out of complacency: how is it that this same nation is constantly reasonable, interesting, moving, very often even sublime and ravishing in its prayers? The Bible, in general, contains a multitude of prayers which have

been compiled into a book in our language; but it also contains, in this genre, the book of books, the book par excellence and which has no rival, that of the Psalms.

THE SENATOR

We have already had a long conversation with Monsieur le Chevalier about the book of Psalms; I pitied him on this subject, as I pity you yourself, for not understanding Slavic: for the translation of the Psalms that we possess in that language is a masterpiece.

THE COUNT

I have no doubt: everyone agrees on this point, and besides, your vote would suffice; but on this matter, you must forgive me for any prejudices or entrenched beliefs. Three languages were once consecrated on Calvary: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; I would prefer that we leave it at that. Two religious languages in the study and one in the church is quite enough. Moreover, I commend all the efforts made in this area by different nations: you know very well that we rarely argue with one another.

THE KNIGHT

I repeat to you today what I said the other day to our dear senator when dealing with the same subject: I admire David a little like Pindar, I mean on his word.

THE COUNT

What are you saying, my dear knight? Pindar has nothing in common with David: the former himself took care to teach us *that he spoke only to scholars, and that he cared very little about being understood by the crowd of his contemporaries, among whom he was not displeased to need interpreters*. To truly understand this poet, it would not be enough for you to *pronounce* him, even to *sing* him; you would also have to dance to him. I will tell you one day about that *Doric shoe,* quite astonished by the new movements prescribed by Pindar's impetuous muse. But even if you were to succeed in understanding him as perfectly as is possible today, you would be of little interest. Pindar's odes are like corpses from which the spirit has departed forever. What do you care about *Hiero's horses* or *Agesias's mules*? What interest do you have in the nobility of cities and their founders, in the miracles of the gods, the exploits of heroes, the loves of nymphs? The charm lay in time and place; no effect of our imagination can revive it. There is no longer an Olympia, no Elis, no Alphaeus; he who would flatter himself that he would find the Peloponnese in Peru would be less ridiculous than he who would seek it in the Morea. David, on the contrary, defies time and space, because he granted nothing to places or circumstances: he sang only of God and of truth, immortal like Him. Jerusalem has not disappeared for us: *it is entirely where we are*; and it is David above all who makes it present to us. Read, then, and reread the Psalms constantly, not, if you will take my advice, in our modern translations, which are too far removed from the source, but in the Latin version adopted by our Church. I know that Hebraism, always more or less visible in the Vulgate, is initially surprising; for the Psalms, as we read them today, although not translated from the original text, were nevertheless translated from a version that itself remained very close to the Hebrew; so the difficulty is the same: but this difficulty yields to the first attempts. *Choose a friend who*Without being a Hebraist, he was nevertheless able, through attentive and deliberate reading, to absorb the spirit of the most ancient language of all those whose monuments have survived, its logical conciseness, more perplexing to us than the boldest grammatical conciseness, and to grasp above all the connection of ideas almost invisible in Orientals, whose bounding genius understands nothing of European nuances. You will see that the essential merit of this translation is that it has managed to pass precisely close enough to and far enough from the Hebrew; you will see how a syllable, a word, and some subtle aid given to the sentence will bring forth before your eyes beauties of the first order. The Psalms are a true *preparation for the Gospel*; for nowhere is the spirit of prayer, which is that of God, more evident, and on all sides one reads in them the promises of all that we possess. The first characteristic of these hymns is that they are always prayers. Even when the subject of a psalm seems entirely accidental, relating only to some event in the life of the King-Prophet, his genius always transcends this narrow confines; he always generalizes: as he sees everything in the immense

unity of the power that inspires him, all his thoughts and feelings turn into prayers: he has not a single line that does not belong to all times and all people. He never needs the indulgence that allows obscurity to temper enthusiasm; and yet, when the Eagle of the Kidron takes flight toward the clouds, your eye will be able to measure below him *more air* than Horace once saw beneath the Swan of Dirce. At times he allows himself to be penetrated by the idea of God's presence, and the most magnificent expressions present themselves in a multitude to his mind: *Where can I hide, where can I flee from your penetrating gaze? If I take the wings of dawn and fly to the ends of the ocean, it is your very hand that leads me there, and there I shall find your power. If I soar into the heavens, you are there; if I plunge into the abyss, you are still there*. Sometimes he casts his eyes upon nature, and his raptures teach us how we should contemplate it. "*Lord*," he says, "*you have flooded me with joy at the sight of your works; I shall be enraptured singing of the works of your hands. How great are your works, O Lord! Your designs are abysses; but the blind do not see these wonders, and the fool does not understand them*."

If he turns to specific phenomena, what an abundance of images! What a wealth of expressions! See with what vigor and grace he expresses the *union* of earth and water: *You visit the earth in your love and fill it with riches! River of the Lord, overflow your banks! Prepare the food of humankind, this is the command you have received; flood the furrows, seek out the seeds of plants, and the earth, filled with life-giving drops, will throb with fertility. Lord, you will crown the year with a wreath of blessings; your clouds will pour forth abundance; islands of greenery will beautify the desert, the hills will be surrounded by gladness; the ears of grain will abound in the valleys; the flocks will be covered with rich fleeces; all beings will shout for joy. Yes, all will sing a hymn to your glory.*

But it is in a more elevated order that we must hear him explain the wonders of this inner devotion, which in his time could only be perceived through inspiration. The divine love that inflames him takes on a prophetic character; it precedes the ages and already belongs to the law of grace. Like Francis de Sales or Fénelon, he discovers in the *human heart those mysterious degrees which, from virtue to virtue, lead us to the God of all gods*. He is inexhaustible when he extols the sweetness and excellence of the divine law. This law is *a lamp for his unsteady foot, a light, a star, illuminating him in the dark paths of virtue; it is true, it is truth itself: it carries its justification within itself; it is sweeter than honey, more desirable than gold and precious stones; and those who are faithful to it will find boundless reward; he will meditate on it day and night. He will hide the oracles of God in his heart so as not to offend him, he cries out: If you enlarge my heart, I will run in the way of your commandments*.

Sometimes the feeling that oppresses him intercepts his breath. A verb, which was about to express the prophet's thought, stops on his lips and falls back on his heart; but pity understands him when he cries out: YOUR ALTARS, O GOD OF SPIRITS!

At other times, we hear him encapsulate the whole of Christianity in a few words. *"Teach me*," he says, " *to do your will, because you are my God*." What philosopher of antiquity ever knew that virtue is nothing but obedience to God, *because he is God*, and that merit depends exclusively on this submissive direction of thought?

He was well aware of the terrible law of our corrupted nature; he knew that man *is conceived in iniquity and rebels from his mother's womb against divine law*. Like the great Apostle, he knew that *man is a slave sold to iniquity, which holds him under its yoke, so that there can be no freedom except where the Spirit of God is*. He therefore cries out with truly Christian truth: " *It is through you that I will be delivered from temptation; leaning on your arm I will cross the wall* "—this wall of separation erected from the beginning between man and the Creator, this wall that must absolutely be crossed, since it cannot be *torn down*. And when he says to God, *"Act with me*," does he not confess, does he not teach the whole truth? On the one hand, *nothing without us*, and on the other, *nothing without you*. If man dares to recklessly rely only on himself, vengeance is ready: *He will be delivered to the inclinations of his heart and the dreams of his mind*.

Certain that man is incapable of praying on his own, David asks God to fill him *with that mysterious oil, that divine anointing that will open his lips and allow them to utter words of praise and joy*; and since he was only recounting his own experience, he lets us see in him the work of inspiration. "*I felt*," he says, "*my heart grow warm within me; flames leaped from my inner thought; then my tongue was loosed, and I spoke*." To these chaste flames of divine love, to these sublime impulses of a spirit enraptured in heaven, compare the putrid heat of Sappho or the smug enthusiasm of Pindar: taste, to decide, has no need of virtue.

See how the Prophet deciphers the unbeliever with a single word: *he refused to believe, for fear of doing good*, and how in another single word he gives a terrible lesson to the believers when he tells them: *You who profess to love the Lord, then hate evil*.

This extraordinary man, enriched with such precious gifts, had nevertheless made himself enormously guilty; but expiation enriched his hymns with new beauties: never did repentance speak a truer, more pathetic, more penetrating language. Ready to receive with resignation all the scourges of the Lord, *he himself wishes to proclaim his iniquities. His crime is constantly before his eyes, and the pain that gnaws at him gives him no rest*. In the midst of Jerusalem, in the heart of this magnificent capital, destined soon to become *the most superb city of magnificent Asia*, on this throne to which the hand of God had led him, *he is alone like the pelican of the desert, like the barn owl hidden in the ruins, like the solitary sparrow that moans on the airy summit of palaces. He spends his nights in groaning, and his sad bed is flooded with his tears. The arrows of the Lord have pierced him. From then on, there is nothing sound in him; his bones are shaken; his flesh is falling away; He bends toward the earth; his heart is troubled; all his strength abandons him; even the light no longer shines for him; he can no longer hear; he has lost his voice: only hope remains*. No thought can distract him from his pain, and this pain, like all his other feelings, always turns into prayer, possessing a vital quality found nowhere else. He constantly recalls an oracle he himself uttered: *God said to the guilty: Why do you presume to proclaim my precepts with your impure mouth? I wish to be praised only by the righteous*. Thus, terror within him is constantly mingled with trust; and even in the transports of love, in the ecstasy of admiration, in the most touching outpourings of boundless gratitude, the sharp point of remorse is felt like a thorn through the crimson blossoms of a rosebush.

Finally, nothing strikes me in these magnificent psalms as much as the Prophet's vast ideas on religion; the religion he professed, though confined to a single point on the globe, was nevertheless distinguished by a marked inclination toward universality. The Temple in Jerusalem was open to all nations, and the disciple of Moses refused to pray to his God with any person, nor for any person: filled with these grand and generous ideas, and moreover driven by the prophetic spirit that showed him beforehand *the swiftness of the word and the power of the Gospel*, David ceaselessly addresses humankind and calls it all to the truth. This call to light, this desire of his heart, recurs constantly in his sublime compositions. To express it in a thousand ways, he exhausts language without ever being satisfied. *Nations of the universe, praise the Lord; listen to me, all you who dwell in time. The Lord is good to all people, and his mercy extends to all works. His kingdom embraces all ages and all generations. Peoples of the earth, shout to God with gladness; sing hymns to the glory of his name; extol his greatness with your songs; say to God: All the ends of the earth will worship you; they will sing praises to the holiness of your name. Peoples, bless your God and let his praises resound everywhere; let your oracles, Lord, be known throughout the earth, and let the salvation we have from you reach all nations. As for me, I am a friend and brother to all who fear you, to all who keep your commandments. Kings, princes, and great ones of the earth, all the peoples of the earth, praise the name of the Lord, for there is no one greater than that name. Let all the peoples, gathered to their rulers, become one family to worship the Lord! Nations of the earth, applaud, sing, sing to our king! Sing, for the Lord is the king of the universe*. Sing with understanding. *Let every spirit praise the Lord*.

God had not disdained to grant this great desire. The prophetic gaze of the holy King, gazing into the distant future, already saw the immense explosion in the *Upper Room* and the face of the earth renewed by the outpouring of the divine spirit. How beautiful and, above all, how true are his words! *From every corner of the earth, people* will remember *the Lord and turn to him; he will reveal himself, and all human families will bow down*.

Wise friends, observe here in passing how infinite goodness could *conceal forty centuries*: it awaited the *memory* of humankind. I will conclude by reminding you of another wish of the Prophet-King: *May these pages*, he said, *be written for future generations, and may peoples who do not yet exist bless the Lord*.

His prayer was answered, because he sang only of the Eternal; his songs partake of eternity: the fiery accents, entrusted to the strings of his divine lyre, still resound after thirty centuries in every part of the world. The synagogue preserved the psalms; the Church hastened to adopt them; the poetry of all Christian nations has taken hold of them; and, for more than three centuries, the sun has ceaselessly illuminated temples whose vaults resound with these sacred hymns. They are sung in Rome, Geneva, Madrid, London, Quebec, Quito, Moscow, Beijing, and Botany Bay; they are murmured in Japan.

THE KNIGHT

Could you tell me why I don't remember reading anything in the Psalms that you just told me?

THE COUNT

No doubt, my young friend, *I can tell you*: this phenomenon stems from the theory of innate ideas. Although there are original notions common to all humankind, without which they would not be human, and which are consequently accessible, or rather natural, to all minds, they are nevertheless far from all being at the same level. On the contrary, some are more or less *dormant*, and others more or less dominant in each mind; and these form what we call *character* or *talent*. Now, it happens that when we receive a kind of intellectual nourishment through reading, each mind appropriates what is most particularly suited to what I might call *its intellectual temperament*, and lets the rest slip away. Hence, we do not read the same things at all in the same books; this is especially true of the other sex compared to ours, for women do not read as we do. This difference being general and therefore more noticeable, I invite you to consider it.

THE SENATOR

The night that has taken us by surprise reminds me, Count, that since you were in such a lively mood, you could have reminded us of something David said about the night. As he devoted much time to it, he spoke of it at length, and I expected that among the important texts presented to you, there would be some on the night. For it is a major topic to which David often returned, and who could be surprised by that? You know, my good friends, that the night is dangerous for humankind, and without realizing it, we all love it a little because it makes us feel at ease. The night is a natural accomplice, constantly at the service of all vices, and this seductive complacency means that, in general, we are all less at night than during the day. Light intimidates vice; the night restores its strength, and it is virtue that is afraid. Once again, the night is worthless to man, and yet, or perhaps because of this very fact, are we not all somewhat idolaters of this facile divinity? Who can boast of never having invoked it for evil? From the highwayman to the salon brigand, what man has never said: " *Flecte, precor, vultus ad mea furta tuos" (Flecte, precor, vultus ad mea furta tuos*)? And what man again has never said: *"Nox conscia novit" (*Night awakens conscience)? The best-ordered society, the best-ordered family, is the one where people are least vigilant, and the extreme corruption of morals is always heralded by extreme abuse in this regard. Night being, therefore, by its very nature, *male suada*, a bad advisor, hence it is that false religions often consecrated it to sinful rites, *nota bonæ secreta deæ (nota goodæ secreta deæ*).

THE COUNT

With your permission, my dear friend, I would say rather that *ancient corruption* had devoted the night to sinful orgies, but that *ancient religion* was not at fault, or had no fault other than that of its impotence; for nothing, I believe, begins with evil. It had placed, for example, the mysteries you mention under the protection of the strictest modesty; it banished from the temple even the smallest male animal, and even the very image of man; the poet you quoted himself recalls this law with his frenzied gaiety, to highlight the terrifying contrast all the more. You see that the original intentions could not be clearer: I would add that, even amidst error, the Vestal Virgin's nocturnal prayer seemed to have been conceived to one day counterbalance the mysteries of the good goddess: but true worship was to distinguish itself on this point, and it did not fail to do so. If the night offers bad advice, as you said earlier, it must be acknowledged that it also offers excellent guidance: it is the season for profound meditation and sublime rapture. To make the most of these divine impulses and to counter the baleful influence you mentioned, Christianity, in turn, has seized upon the night and consecrated it to holy ceremonies, which it enlivens with austere music and powerful hymns. Religion itself, in all that is not dogma, is subject to certain changes that our poor nature renders inevitable; however, even in matters of pure discipline, some will always remain constant. For example, there will always be feasts that call us all to the night office, and there will *always* be chosen men whose pious voices will be heard in the darkness, for the legitimate hymn must never fall silent on earth.

The day-to-day reminds us

The night announces it to the night.

THE SENATOR

Alas! Who knows if you are not expressing, at this moment at least, a wish rather than a truth? How weakened the reign of prayer has become, and what means have not been employed to silence its voice! Has not our century asked *what purpose those who pray serve*? How will prayer pierce the darkness when it is scarcely permitted to be heard by day? But I do not wish to stray into these gloomy premonitions. You have said all that I could have overlooked concerning the night, without, however, having said what David said about it; and this is what I would like to fill in. I ask your permission, in turn, to stick to my main idea. Full of ideas that he did not derive from any man, David constantly exhorts man *to suspend his sleep in prayer*: he believed that the august silence of the night lent a particular power to holy desires. *"I sought God*," he said, "*during the night, and I was not deceived*." Elsewhere he said, "*I conversed with my heart during the night. I practiced this meditation and questioned my mind*." At other times, reflecting on certain dangers which, in ancient times, must have been greater than in our day, he said in his victorious conscience, "*Lord, I remembered your name* during the night, *and I kept your law*." And doubtless he truly believed that the influence of the night was a test of hearts, since he adds, "*You have tested my heart by visiting it at night*."

Night air is worthless to physical man; animals teach us this by all seeking shelter to sleep. Our illnesses teach us this by all raging during the night. Why do you send to your sick friend in the morning to ask *how he spent the night*, rather than in the evening to ask *how he spent the day*? There must be something bad about the night. Hence the necessity of sleep, which is not meant for the day, and which is no less necessary to the mind than to the body, for if both were continually exposed to the action of certain forces that constantly attack them, neither could *live*; therefore, harmful forces must be periodically suspended, and both must be placed under a protective influence during these intervals. And just as the body continues its vital functions during sleep, without the sensible principle being conscious of them, so too do the *vital* functions of the mind continue, as you can be convinced of independently of any theory, by common experience, since a person can learn during sleep and know, for example, upon waking, verses or the tune of a song that they did not know when they fell asleep. But for the analogy to be perfect, it was also necessary that the intelligent principle likewise have no consciousness of what is happening within it during this time; or at least it was necessary that it retain no memory of it, which amounts to the same thing for the established order. From the universal belief that a person is then under a good and preserving influence arose the other belief, similarly universal, *that the time of sleep is favorable to divine communications*. This opinion, whatever its basis, is undeniably supported by Holy Scripture, which presents a great number of examples of this kind. We also see that false religions have always professed the same belief: for error, while turning its back on its rival, nevertheless ceaselessly repeats all its acts and doctrines, altering them according to its strength—that is, in such a way that the type can never be misrecognized, nor the image taken for it. Middleton and other writers of the same ilk have expended a great deal of erudition to prove that your Church imitates a host of pagan ceremonies, reproaches they would have leveled at ours as well had they thought of us. Deceived by a negative religion and a gaunt cult, they have failed to recognize the eternal forms of a positive religion that will be found everywhere. Modern travelers have found in America the Vestal Virgins, the new fire, circumcision, baptism, confession, and finally the *Real Presence* under the *types* of *bread* and *wine*.

Shall we say that we derive these same ceremonies from the Mexicans or the Peruvians? We must be careful not to always infer conformity from a subordinate deviation: for the reasoning to be legitimate, we must first have excluded the common derivation. Now, returning to the subject of night and dreams, we see that the greatest geniuses of antiquity, without distinction, had no doubt whatsoever about the importance of dreams, and that they even came to sleep in temples to receive oracles. Did not Job say that *God uses dreams to warn man*: a warning he never repeats? And did not David say, as I reminded you earlier, *that God visits hearts during the night*? Does not Plato want *us to prepare ourselves for dreams through great purity of soul and body*? Did not Hippocrates compose a treatise specifically on dreams, in which he goes so far as to refuse to recognize as a true physician someone who does not know how to interpret dreams? It seems to me that a Latin poet, Lucretius, if I am not mistaken, went perhaps further by saying *that the gods, during sleep, speak to the soul and the spirit*.

Finally, Marcus Aurelius (and I am not quoting a weak mind here) not only considered these nocturnal communications an indisputable fact, but he also declared, in his own words, that he had been the recipient of them. What do you say to that, gentlemen? Would you perhaps be inclined to maintain that all of sacred and

secular antiquity was babbling nonsense? That man has never been able to see what he sees, to experience what he experiences? That the great men I cite were weak minds? That...

THE KNIGHT

For my part, I do not yet believe I have acquired the right to be impertinent.

THE SENATOR

And I also believe that no one can acquire this right, which, thank God, does not exist.

THE COUNT

Tell me, my dear friend, why don't you gather together a multitude of thoughts, of a very elevated and uncommon kind, that constantly come to you when we speak of metaphysics or religion? You could entitle this collection: *Philosophical Impulses*. There is indeed a work written in Latin under the same title; *but those are impulses that would break one's neck*: yours, it seems to me, could lift a man without danger.

THE KNIGHT

I urge you to do the same, my dear senator; meanwhile, gentlemen, something will happen to me, by your grace, which has certainly never happened to me before in my life: I will fall asleep thinking of the *Prophet-King*. The honor is yours!

END OF SEVENTH INTERVIEW

EIGHTH INTERVIEW

THE KNIGHT

Gentlemen, please allow me to present you with the minutes of the previous sessions before we continue our discussions.

THE SENATOR

What do you mean, sir knight?

THE KNIGHT

The pleasure I derive from our conversations gave me the idea of writing them down. Everything we say here is deeply imprinted in my memory. You know that this faculty is very strong in me: it's a merit so slight that I don't presume to boast about it; besides, I don't give ideas time to slip away. Every evening before going to bed, while they are still very much present in my mind, I jot down the main points, and so to speak, the *outline* of the conversation; the next day I get to work early and finish the narrative, focusing especially on following the thread of the discourse and the progression of ideas. You also know that I don't lack time, for it's far from us being able to meet exactly every day; I even consider it impossible for three independent people to do the same thing, at the same time, every day for just two or three weeks. They may well agree, promise each other, give their word expressly, and set aside all other business, but there will always be some insurmountable obstacle from time to time, and often it will be nothing more than a trifle. Men cannot be united for any purpose without a law or rule that deprives them of their will: one must be a religious or a soldier. I have therefore had more time than necessary, and I believe that few essential ideas have escaped me. You will not, moreover, deny me the pleasure of hearing

my work read aloud: and you will understand, from the width of the margins, that I have relied on numerous corrections. I promised myself genuine enjoyment in this collaborative work; but I confess that in imposing this arduous task upon myself, I thought of others more than of myself. I know many men in the world, many young men especially, who are extremely disgusted with modern doctrines. Others are adrift and only want to settle down. I would like to share with them the same ideas that have occupied our evenings, convinced that I would be useful to some and agreeable to at least many others. Every man is a kind of faith for another, and nothing delights him, once he is imbued with a belief and as he becomes more imbued with it, than to find it in the person he esteems. If it seemed to you that my pen, aided by a fortunate memory and rigorous revision, had faithfully rendered our conversations, I might very well be foolish enough to send them to the printer.

THE COUNT

I could be wrong, but I don't believe such a work would succeed.

THE KNIGHT

Why, I beg you? You were telling me, however, not long ago: *that a conversation was better than a book*.

THE COUNT

It is undoubtedly better for learning, since it allows for interruption, questioning and explanation; but it does not follow that it is meant to be printed.

THE KNIGHT

Let's not confuse the terms: conversation, dialogue, and discussion *are* not synonymous. *Conversation*, by its very nature, meanders: it never has a predetermined purpose; it depends on circumstances; it admits an unlimited number of interlocutors. I will therefore agree, if you will, that it would not be suited to printing, even if it were possible, because of a certain *jumble* of thoughts, the result of the most bizarre transitions, which often lead us to speak, in the same fifteen minutes, of the existence of God and of comic opera.

But the *conversation* is much wiser; it presupposes a subject, and if that subject is serious, it seems to me that the conversation is subject to the rules of dramatic art, which do not admit a fourth interlocutor. This rule is inherent in nature. If we had a fourth person here, it would greatly hinder us.

As for *dialogue*, the word itself represents nothing but fiction; for it presupposes a conversation that never existed. It is a purely artificial construct: thus, one can write as many as one likes; it is a composition like any other, which springs fully formed, like Minerva, from the writer's brain; and the dialogues of the *dead*, which have graced more than one pen, are as real, and even as probable, as those of the living published by other authors. This genre is therefore entirely foreign to us.

Since you both introduced me to serious reading, I have read Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, translated into French by President Bouhier and Abbé d'Olivet. Here is yet another work of pure imagination, and one that doesn't even give the impression of a real conversation. Cicero introduces a listener whom he simply designates by the letter A: he has this imaginary listener ask him a question, and answers him in one breath with a regular dissertation: this kind of discourse cannot be ours. We are not capital letters; we are very real, very tangible beings: we speak to instruct and to console ourselves. There is no subordination between us; and, despite the superiority of age and knowledge, you grant me an equality that I do not ask for. I therefore maintain that if our interviews were published faithfully, that is to say with all the accuracy that is possible... Are you laughing, Senator?

THE SENATOR

I do laugh, because it seems to me that, without realizing it, you are making a powerful argument against your own project. How could you more clearly agree on the drawbacks it would entail than by drawing us into a conversation about conversations ourselves? Wouldn't you happen to want to write it down as well?

THE KNIGHT

I would certainly not fail to do so, I assure you, if I were to publish the book; and I am convinced that no one would be offended. As for the other digressions inevitable in any real conversation, I see more advantages than disadvantages, provided they arise from the subject and without any force. It seems to me that not all truths can stand on their own: some need to be, so to speak, *flanked* by other truths, and from this comes that very true maxim I read somewhere: *that to know one thing well, one must know a few thousand things*. I therefore believe that this ease that conversation provides—the ability to secure one's position by supporting a proposition with others when necessary—that this ease, I say, transposed into a book, could have its value and bring art to carelessness.

THE SENATOR

Listen, Sir, I place this on your conscience, and I believe our friend feels the same. Besides, I have little fear that responsibility will ever keep you awake at night, as the book can do little harm, it seems to me. All we ask of you is that you refrain from anything, even if you were to publish the work only after our deaths, and that you say in the preface: " *I hope the reader will not regret their money*," otherwise you will see us appear like furious shades, and woe betide you!

THE KNIGHT

Don't be afraid: I don't think I'll ever be caught looting Locke, after the fear you gave me.

Whatever may happen in the future, let us consider, I beg you, where we stand today. Our discussions began with an examination of the great and eternal complaint constantly raised about the success of crime and the misfortunes of virtue; and we have become entirely convinced that there is nothing in the world less well-founded than this complaint, and that even for someone who does not believe in an afterlife, the path of virtue would always be the surest way to obtain the highest chance of earthly happiness. What has been said about torture, illness, and remorse leaves no room for the slightest doubt on this point. I have paid particular attention to these two fundamental axioms: namely, first, that *no man is punished as just, but always as a man*, so that it is false that virtue suffers in this world: it is human nature that suffers, and it always deserves it; And secondly, that *the greatest temporal happiness is by no means promised, nor could it be, to the virtuous man, but to virtue itself*. Indeed, for order to be visible and irreproachable, even in this world, it suffices that the greatest amount of happiness be bestowed upon the greatest amount of virtue in general; and given that man is as he is, it is not even possible for our reason to imagine another order of things that has even an appearance of reason and justice. But since there is no just man, there is none who has the right to refuse to willingly bear his share of human miseries, since he is necessarily criminal or of criminal blood; which has led us to thoroughly examine the entire theory of *original sin*, which is unfortunately that of human nature. We have seen in savage nations a weakened image of primitive crime; And since man is but animated speech, the degradation of speech presented itself to us not as that degradation itself; this led us to several reflections on languages and on the origin of speech and ideas. These points clarified, prayer naturally presented itself to us as a supplement to all that had been said, since it is a remedy granted to man to restrain the dominion of evil by perfecting himself, and he has only his own vices to blame if he refuses to use this remedy. To this word " *prayer"* we have seen arise the great objection of a blind or guilty philosophy, which, seeing in physical evil only an inevitable result of the eternal laws of nature, obstinately maintains that by that very fact it escapes entirely the action of prayer. This deadly sophism has been discussed and refuted in the greatest detail. The plagues that have afflicted us, and which are very aptly called *plagues from heaven*, have appeared to us. *The laws of nature,* just as tortures are *laws of society*, and consequently of a purely secondary necessity that should inflame our prayer, far from discouraging it. We could doubtless have been content in this regard with general ideas, and considered all these kinds of calamities only collectively; however, we allowed the conversation to meander a little in this sorrowful field, and war, above all, occupied us greatly. It is, I assure you, the one of all our excursions that has most captivated me; for you have made me consider this scourge of war from a completely new perspective, and I intend to reflect on it with all my might.

THE SENATOR

Pardon me for interrupting, Sir; but before abandoning entirely the interesting discussion on the sufferings of the righteous, I wish to submit for your consideration some thoughts that I believe to be well-founded and which, in my opinion, can lead us to consider the temporal punishments of this life as one of the greatest and most natural solutions to all the objections raised on this point against divine justice. The righteous person, in their capacity as a human being, would nevertheless be subject to all the evils that threaten humanity; and since they would be subject to them precisely because of this human capacity, they would have no right to complain; you have observed this, and nothing could be clearer; but you have also observed, which unfortunately requires no proof, that there is no *righteous* person in the strictest sense of the term: from which it follows that every person has something to atone for. But if the just man (as he may exist) accepts the sufferings due to his human nature, and if divine justice in turn accepts this acceptance, I see nothing so happy for him, nor so obviously just.

I firmly believe, in my heart and conscience, that if man could live in this world free from all kinds of suffering, he would eventually become so dulled that he would completely forget all heavenly things and even God himself. How could he, in that scenario, concern himself with a higher order, since in the very world in which we live, the miseries that overwhelm us cannot disenchant us with the deceptive charms of this wretched life?

THE KNIGHT

I don't know if I'm mistaken, but it seems to me that there would be nothing so unfortunate as a man who had never experienced misfortune: for such a man could never be sure of himself, nor know his own worth. Suffering is to the virtuous man what battles are to the soldier: it perfects him and accumulates his merits. Has the brave man ever complained to the army about always being chosen for the most perilous expeditions? On the contrary, he seeks them out and prides himself on them: for him, suffering is an occupation, and death an adventure. Let the coward amuse himself by living as long as he likes, that's his business; but let him not deafen us with his impertinence about the misfortune of those who are not like him. The comparison seems entirely apt to me: if the brave man thanks the general who sends him into battle, why shouldn't he likewise thank God who makes him suffer? I don't know how this happens, but it is nonetheless certain that man gains from suffering voluntarily, that public opinion itself esteems him more for it. I have often observed, with regard to religious austerities, that even vice, which mocks them, cannot help but pay them homage. What libertine has ever found the opulent courtesan, who sleeps at midnight on the eiderdown, happier than the austere Carmelite nun who keeps watch and prays for us at the same hour? But I always come back to what you have so rightly observed: *that there is no such thing as justice*. It is therefore through a particular act of kindness that God punishes in this world, instead of punishing much more severely in the next. You will know, gentlemen, that there is nothing I believe in more firmly than purgatory. How could punishments not always be proportionate to crimes? I find, above all, that the new thinkers who have denied eternal punishment are strangely foolish if they do not expressly admit purgatory: for, I ask you, whom will these people convince that Robespierre's soul leapt from the scaffold into the bosom of God like that of Louis XVI? This opinion, however, is not as rare as one might imagine: I spent some years, since my *departure*, in certain regions of Germany where the doctors of law no longer want either hell or purgatory: there is nothing so extravagant. Who has ever imagined having a soldier shot for a porcelain pipe stolen from the barracks? However, this pipe must not be stolen with impunity; The thief must be *purged* of this theft before he can stand in line with the good people.

THE SENATOR

It must be admitted, Sir Knight, that if we ever have a *Summa Theologica* written in this style, it will not fail to be very successful in the world.

THE KNIGHT

This is not a matter of style at all: everyone has their own; it is a matter of facts. Now, I say that purgatory is the dogma of common sense; and since every sin must be expiated in this world or the next, it follows that the afflictions sent to humankind by divine justice are a true blessing, since these punishments, when we have the wisdom to accept them, are, so to speak, *deducted* from those of the future. I add that they are a clear pledge of love, since this anticipation or commutation of punishment obviously excludes eternal damnation. He who has

never suffered in this world cannot be sure of anything; and the less he has suffered, the less certain he is: but I do not see what he who has suffered with acceptance can fear, or to express myself more precisely, what he can cause to *be feared.*

THE COUNT

You have reasoned perfectly, Monsieur le Chevalier, and I must even congratulate you on having met Seneca; for you have said of the Carmelites precisely what he said of the Vestal Virgins: I do not know if you are aware that these famous virgins rose at night, and that they had their *matins*, quite literally, like our nuns of the strict observance: in any case, count on this point of history. The only critical observation I will allow myself on your theology can also, it seems to me, be addressed to this same Seneca: "Would you rather," he said, "be Sulla than Regulus, etc.?" But please be careful that there is not a slight confusion of ideas here. It is not at all a question of the glory attached to virtue that calmly endures dangers, privations, and sufferings; For on this point everyone agrees: the question is why it pleased God to make this merit necessary? You will find blasphemers, and even simply frivolous men, ready to tell you: " *God could well have bestowed this kind of glory upon virtue*." Seneca, unable to answer as well as you, because he did not possess as much of it as you (which I urge you to note), seized upon this glory, which lends itself so readily to rhetoric; and this is what gives his treatise on Providence, otherwise so beautiful and so estimable, a slight air of declamation. As for you, Senator, even setting this consideration aside, you have quite rightly pointed out that every man suffers because he is man, because he would be God if he did not suffer, and because those who demand an impassive man are demanding a different world. And you added something no less undeniable by noting that since no man is righteous, that is to say, free from actual crimes (except for true sainthood, which is very rare), God truly shows mercy to the guilty by punishing them in this world. I believe I would have spoken to you about those future temporary punishments we call *purgatory*, if Monsieur le Chevalier had not forbidden me to seek my evidence in the other world.

THE KNIGHT

You didn't quite understand me: I only excluded from our discussions the punishments that threaten the perverse man in the other world; but as for the temporary punishments imposed on the predestined, that's another matter...

THE COUNT

As you please. It is certain that these future and temporary punishments provide, for all who believe in them, a direct and peremptory answer to all objections based on the sufferings of the supposedly righteous, and it is also true that this dogma is so plausible that it seizes, so to speak, common sense and does not await revelation. I do not know, moreover, if you are not mistaken in believing that, in this country where you *have spent* so much zeal and valor without fruit, but not without merit, you have heard *the doctors of the law* deny both hell and purgatory. You may very well have taken the denial of a word for that of a thing. Words have enormous power! Some minister, whom the mere mention of purgatory would anger, will readily grant us a *place of expiation* or an *intermediate state*, or perhaps even stations; who knows...? without considering himself in the least ridiculous. “You have nothing to say, my dear senator? I will continue.” “One of the major causes of the 16th ˉ century discord was precisely *purgatory*. The insurgents wanted to reduce nothing of pure and simple hell. However, when they became philosophers, they began to deny the eternity of punishments, nevertheless allowing a *temporary hell* to exist, solely for the sake of good governance, and for fear of sending Nero and Messalina to heaven all at once alongside Saint Louis and Saint Teresa. But a temporary hell is nothing other than purgatory; so that after having quarreled with us because they don't want purgatory, they quarrel again because they want nothing but purgatory: that is what is extravagant, as you said earlier. But enough on this subject.” I hasten to arrive at one of the considerations most worthy of exercising all of man's intelligence, although, in fact, the common people concern themselves with it very little.

The righteous person, by suffering voluntarily, not only satisfies himself, but also the guilty person through reversibility.

This is one of the greatest and most important truths of the spiritual order; but to treat it thoroughly would require more time than I have today. Let us therefore postpone the discussion until tomorrow, and allow me to devote the last moments of the evening to developing some thoughts that have occurred to me on the same subject.

It is said that *the successes of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous in this world cannot be explained* by reason alone. This undoubtedly means that there is an injustice in the order we see that is incompatible with God's justice; otherwise, the objection would be meaningless. Now, since this objection could come from either an atheist or a theist, I will first assume the former to avoid any confusion. Consider, then, what all this means coming from one of these atheists by conviction and profession.

I truly don't know if that unfortunate Hume understood himself when he so criminally, and even so foolishly, with all his genius, said: " *That it was impossible to justify the character of the Divinity*." Justify the character of a being that does not exist!

Again, what are we trying to say? It seems to me that everything boils down to this reasoning: God is unjust, therefore he doesn't exist. This is curious! It's as valid as Voltaire's Spinoza saying to God: " *Between us, I believe you don't exist*." So the unbeliever will have to turn around and say: *"The existence of evil is an argument against God's existence; because if God existed, this evil, which is an injustice, wouldn't exist*." Ah! So these gentlemen know that God, who doesn't exist, *is just by nature*! They know the attributes of a chimerical being; and they are able to tell us, at the opportune moment, what God would look like here if, by chance, there were one: truly, there is no better-formed madness. If it were permissible to laugh at such a sad subject, who wouldn't laugh to hear men, as level-headed as we are, argue against God using the very idea He gave them of Himself, without considering that this very idea proves God, since one cannot conceive of what does not exist? Indeed, can man represent himself to himself, and can painting represent to his eyes anything other than what exists? Raphael's inexhaustible imagination may have filled his famous gallery with fantastical assemblages; but each piece exists in nature. The same is true of the moral world: man can only conceive of what is; thus, the atheist, in order to deny God, presupposes Him.

Moreover, gentlemen, all this is merely a kind of preface to the favorite idea I wished to share with you. I admit the absurd supposition of a hypothetical God, and I further admit that the laws of the universe can be unjust or cruel toward us without having an intelligent author; which, however, is the height of extravagance: what will result from this against the existence of God? Absolutely nothing. Intelligence proves itself to intelligence only through *numbers*. All other considerations can only relate to certain properties or qualities of the intelligent subject, which has nothing to do with the original question of existence.

Number, gentlemen, *number*! or order and *symmetry*; for order is only *number ordered*, and symmetry is only *order perceived* and *compared*.

Tell me, I pray you, if, when Nero once illuminated his gardens with torches, each containing and burning a living man, the alignment of those hideous torches did not demonstrate to the observer an ordering intelligence as effectively as the peaceful illumination yesterday for the feast day of Her Majesty the Empress Mother? If the month of July brought back the plague every year, this neat cycle would be just as regular as the harvest. Let us begin, then, to see if number exists in the universe; to know then *whether* and *why* man is treated well or badly in this world: that is another question, which can be examined another time, and which has nothing to do with the first.

Number is the obvious barrier between the brute and us; in the immaterial order, as *in* the physical order, the use of fire distinguishes us from it in a sharp and indelible way. God gave us number, and it is through number that he proves himself to us, just as it is through number that man proves himself to his fellow man. Take away number, and you take away the arts, the sciences, and consequently intelligence. Bring it back: with it reappear his two celestial daughters, harmony and beauty; the *cry* becomes *song*, noise receives *rhythm*, the leap is *dance*, force is called *dynamics*, and traces are *figures*. A clear proof of this truth is that in languages (at least in those I know, and I believe the same is true of those I don't) the same words express both number and thought: we say, for example, that the *reason* of a great man discovered the *reason* for such a progression; we speak of *wise reason* and *inverse reason*, *miscalculations* in politics, and *miscalculations* in calculations; the very word " *calculation*," which comes to mind, takes on a double meaning, and we say: " *I was mistaken in all my calculations*," even though it has nothing to do with calculations at all. Finally, we also say: " *He's counting his coins*," and *"He's planning to come*

see you," which only habit prevents us from finding extraordinary. Words relating to weights, measures, and balance constantly bring number back into discourse *as* a synonym for thought or its processes; and doesn't this very word " *thought* " come from a Latin word related to number?

Intelligence, like beauty, delights in self-reflection; and the mirror of intelligence is number. Hence our shared taste for symmetry; for every intelligent being loves to place and recognize its own sign, which is order, on every side. Why are soldiers in uniform more pleasing to the eye than in ordinary clothing? Why do we prefer to see them marching in formation rather than in disarray? Why must the trees in our gardens, the dishes on our tables, the furniture in our apartments, and so on, be arranged symmetrically to please us? Why do rhyme, meter, refrains, meter, and rhythm please us in music and poetry? Can you even imagine that there is, for example, any intrinsic beauty in our *simple* rhymes (so aptly named)? This form, and so many others, can only please us because intelligence delights in everything that demonstrates intelligence, and its principal sign is number. It therefore enjoys itself wherever it recognizes itself, and the pleasure that symmetry gives us could have no other root; but let us abstract from this pleasure and examine only the thing in itself. As these words that I pronounce at this moment prove to you the existence of the one who pronounces them, and as if they were written, they would prove it likewise to all those who would read these words arranged according to the laws of syntax, so too all created beings prove by their *syntax* the existence of a supreme writer who speaks to us by these signs; indeed, all these beings are letters whose union forms a discourse that proves God, that is to say, the intelligence that pronounces it: for there can be no discourse without a *speaking soul*, nor writing without a writer; Unless one wishes to maintain that the curve I crudely trace on paper with a ring of thread and a compass clearly proves an intelligence that traced it, but that the same curve described by a planet proves nothing; or that an achromatic telescope clearly proves the existence of *Dollond* de *Ramsden*, etc.; but that the marvelous instrument I have just named, of which it is only a crude imitation, proves neither the existence of a supreme artist nor the intention to prevent aberration! Once upon a time, a navigator, shipwrecked on an island he believed to be deserted, saw, while exploring the shore, a geometric figure drawn in the sand: he recognized the man and gave thanks to the gods. Would a figure of the same kind therefore have less power if written in the sky, and is not the number always the same, however it is presented to us? Look closely: it is written on all parts of the universe and especially on the human body. *Two* is striking in the marvelous balance of the two sexes, which no science has been able to disturb; it shows itself in our eyes, in our ears, etc. *Thirty-two* is written in our mouth; and *twenty* divided by four carries its invariable *quotient* to the extremities of our four limbs. Number unfolds in the plant kingdom, with a richness that astounds by its invariable constancy in infinite varieties. Remember, Senator, what you told me one day, based on your extensive collections on the number *three* in particular: it is written in the stars, on the earth; in the intelligence of man, in his body; in truth, in fable; in the Gospel, in the Talmud; in the Veda; in all religious ceremonies, ancient or modern, legitimate or illegitimate, sprinklings, ablutions, invocations, exorcisms, charms, spells, black or white magic; in the mysteries of Kabbalah, theurgy, alchemy, and all secret societies; in theology, geometry, politics, grammar, and countless rhetorical or poetic formulas that escape the *untrained* eye; in short, in everything that exists. Perhaps some will say *it's chance*: come now! – Desperate madmen take a different approach: they say (I've heard it) *that it's a law of nature*. But what is a law? Is it the will of a legislator? In that case, they're saying what we're saying. Is it the purely mechanical result of certain elements acting in a certain way? So, since these elements must be arranged and act in a certain invariable way in order to produce a general and invariable order, the question begins again, and it turns out that instead of one proof of the order and the intelligence that produced it, there are two; as if several dice thrown a great many times always bring *a run of six*, the intelligence will be proven by the invariability of the number which is the effect, and by the inner work of the artist which is the cause.

In a city ablaze with philosophical fervor, I had occasion to make a singular observation: the appearance of order, symmetry, and consequently of number and intelligence, pressing too intensely upon certain men whom I remember very well, to escape this torment of conscience, they invented an *ingenious* subterfuge from which they derive the greatest benefit. They began to maintain that it is impossible to recognize *intention* unless one knows *the object of the intention*: you cannot imagine how attached they are to this idea, which delights them because it relieves them of the common sense that torments them. They have made the search for intentions a major undertaking, a kind of *arcane science* which, according to them, constitutes a profound science and immense works. I heard them say, speaking of a great physicist who had uttered something along these lines: " *He dares to rise to the final causes"* (that is what they call intentions). Look at the great effort! Another time they warned *us to be very careful not to mistake an effect for an intention*; which would be very dangerous, as you can imagine: for if one were to believe that God interferes in something that happens on its own, or that He had one intention while

having another, what disastrous consequences such an error would have! To give the idea I am speaking of all the force it can have, I have always noticed that they make a point of confining the search for intentions as much as possible to the realm of the third kingdom. They retreat, so to speak, into mineralogy and what they call *geology*, where intentions are less visible, at least to them, and which, moreover, offer them the widest field for dispute and denial (it is the paradise of pride); but as for the *realm of life*, from which a voice emanates that is a little too clear *and makes itself heard*, they don't much like to discuss it. I often spoke to them about animals purely out of mischief, but they always brought me back to molecules, atoms, gravity, the Earth's layers, and so on. " *What do we know*," they would always ask me with the most comical modesty, " *what do we know about animals? Does the germ physicist even know what a germ is? Do we understand anything about the essence of organization? Have we taken a single step in understanding generation? The production of organized beings is a closed book to us*." And the result of this great mystery is this: since the animal is a *closed* book, we cannot read any intention into it.

You may find it hard to believe that it's possible to reason so poorly; but you'll be giving them too much credit. That's what they think; or at least that's what they want people to believe (which is not nearly the same thing). On points where sound reasoning is impossible, the sectarian spirit does what it can; it digresses, it misleads, and above all, it strives to leave things in a certain twilight conducive to error. I repeat that when these philosophers discourse on intentions, or, as they say, on *final causes* (but I don't like that word), they always speak of inanimate nature when they are in control of the discourse, carefully avoiding being led into the realm of the first two kingdoms where they know very well that the terrain resists their tactics; But, in one way or another, everything hinges on their grand maxim, that *intention* cannot be proven until *the object of the intention* has been proven; and I cannot imagine a cruder sophism: how can one fail to see that there cannot be endless symmetry, since symmetry alone is an *end* for the one who creates the *symmetry*? A *timepiece*, lost in the forests of America and found by a Native American, demonstrates to him the hand and intelligence of a craftsman as surely as it demonstrates them to Mr. Schubbert. Since we need only *an end* to draw our conclusion, we are not obliged to answer the sophist who asks us *what end*? I have a canal dug around my castle: one person says *it is to preserve fish*; another, *it is to protect against thieves*; a third, finally, *it is to drain and reclaim the land*. All of them can be mistaken; But the one who would be absolutely certain of being right is the one who would simply say: *He had it* dug *for purposes known only to him*. As for the philosopher who would come and tell us: "As long as you don't all agree on the intention, I have the right to see none. The canal bed is merely a natural subsidence of the land; the lining is a concretion; the balustrade is simply the work of a volcano, no more extraordinary in its regularity than those assemblages of basalt spires that one sees in Ireland and elsewhere, etc."

THE KNIGHT

Do you think, gentlemen, that it would have been a little too brutal to tell him: *My good friend, the canal is intended for bathing madmen*, which would be proven to him on the spot?

THE SENATOR

I would personally oppose this way of reasoning, for the simple reason that upon emerging from the water, the philosopher would have had the right to say: *This proves nothing*.

THE COUNT

Ah! What a mistake you are making, my dear senator! Pride has never said, " *I am wrong"*; and that of these people least of all. Even if you were to present it with the most convincing argument, it would still tell you, " *That proves nothing*." Since the answer must always be the same, why not adopt the argument that does justice? But as neither the philosopher, nor the canal, nor especially the castle are here, I will continue, if you will allow me.

They speak of *disorder* in the universe; but what is *disorder*? It is apparently a deviation from order; therefore, one cannot object to *disorder* without acknowledging a prior *order*, and consequently, intelligence. One can form a perfectly accurate idea of the universe by viewing it as a vast natural history cabinet shaken by an earthquake. The door is open and broken; there are no more windows; entire cabinets have fallen; others still hang from pegs ready to detach. Seashells have rolled in the mineral room, and a hummingbird's nest rests on a crocodile's head. – Yet

what fool could doubt the original intention, or believe that the building was constructed in this state? All the great masses are together: in the smallest shard of glass, one sees them in their entirety; the emptiness of a layette replaces it: order is as visible as disorder; And as he walks through this vast temple of nature, he effortlessly restores everything that a disastrous agent has broken, damaged, defiled, or displaced. There is more: look closely, and you will already recognize a restorative hand. Some beams are propped up; roads have been carved out amidst the rubble; and, in the general confusion, a multitude of *similar structures* have already been re-established and are touching one another. Thus, there are two visible intentions instead of one, namely, order and restoration; but limiting ourselves to the first idea, since *disorder* necessarily presupposes order, he who argues from disorder against the existence of God presupposes it in order to refute it.

You see what this famous argument boils down to: *Either God was able to prevent the evil we see, and he lacked goodness; or wanting to prevent it, he could not, and he lacked power*. – MY GOD! What does that mean? It's neither a question of omnipotence nor of omnipotence; it's a question only of *existence* and *power*. I know very well that God cannot change the essences of things; but I know only an infinitely small part of these essences, so that I am ignorant of an infinitely large quantity of things that God cannot do, without thereby ceasing to be omnipotent. I do not know what is possible, I do not know what is impossible; in my life I have studied only number; I believe only in number; it is the sign, it is the voice, it is the word of intelligence; and since it is everywhere, I see it everywhere.

But let us leave aside the atheists, who fortunately are very few in number in the world, and return to the question with theism. I wish to be just as accommodating to it as I have been to the atheist; however, it will not be amiss if I begin by asking it what injustice is. If it does not grant me that *it is an act that violates a law*, the word will lose all meaning; and if it does not grant me that *law is the will of a legislator manifested to its subjects to be the rule of their conduct, I will understand the word " law"* no better than that of " *injustice*." Now, I understand very well how a human law can be *unjust* when it violates a divine, revealed, or innate law; but the legislator of the universe is God. What, then, is an injustice of God toward humankind? Could there perhaps be some common lawgiver above God who prescribed for him how he should act toward man? And who will be the judge between him and us? If the theist believes that the idea of God does not entail that of an injustice like ours, what is he complaining about? He doesn't know what he's saying. But if, on the contrary, he believes God to be just according to our ideas, while complaining about the injustices he observes in our current state, he unwittingly admits a monstrous contradiction, namely, *the injustice of a just God. Such an order of things is unjust; Therefore, it cannot take place under the rule of a just God:* this argument is merely an error in the mouth of an atheist, but in that of the theist it is an absurdity: God being once admitted, and his justice also being admitted as a necessary attribute of divinity, the theist can no longer go back on his steps without being unreasonable, and he must say on the contrary: *Such an order of things takes place under the rule of an essentially just God: therefore this order of things is just for reasons which we do not know*; explaining the order of things by the attributes, instead of foolishly accusing the attributes by the order of things.

But I even grant this supposed theist the guilty and no less crazy proposition, *that there is no way to justify the character of the Divinity*.

What practical conclusion can we draw from this? For that is the main point. Allow me, I beg you, *to present* this fine argument: *God is unjust, cruel, and merciless; God delights in the misfortune of his creatures; therefore...* this is where I expect the murmurers! – *So* apparently *we shouldn't pray to him*. – On the contrary, gentlemen; and nothing could be clearer: *therefore we must pray to him* and serve him with far *more zeal and fervor* than if his mercy were boundless, as we imagine. I would like to ask you a question: if you had lived under the laws of a prince—not a wicked one, mind you, but simply a severe and touchy one, never at ease in his authority, and unable to turn a blind eye to the slightest move of his subjects—I would be curious to know if you would have believed you could take the same liberties as under the rule of another prince of a completely opposite character, happy with general liberty, always yielding to the common man, and constantly fearing his power so that no one else would? Certainly not. Well! The comparison is striking and undeniable. The more terrible God seems to us, the more we must redouble our religious fear of him, the more ardent and tireless our prayers must be: for nothing tells us that his goodness will compensate for them. Since the proof of God's existence precedes that of his attributes, we know *that he* exists before we know *what he is*; indeed, we will never fully know *what he is*. So here we are, placed in an empire whose sovereign has published once and for all the laws that govern everything. These laws are, in general, marked by a striking wisdom and even kindness; some, however (I suppose at this moment), seem harsh, even

unjust if you will. On this point, I ask all the discontented, what should be done? Leave the empire, perhaps? Impossible: it is everywhere, and nothing is outside of it. Complain, be resentful, write against the sovereign? That is to be flogged or put to death. There is no better course to take than that of resignation and respect, I would even say love; for since we start from the assumption that the master exists, and that one must absolutely *serve him*, is it not better (whoever he may be) to serve him out of love than without love?

I will not revisit the arguments with which we refuted, in our previous conversations, the complaints that some dare to raise against Providence, but I feel compelled to add that there is something intrinsically false and even foolish in these complaints, or, as the English say, a certain *nonsense* that is glaringly obvious. What, indeed, is the meaning of complaints that are either sterile or culpable, that provide humanity with no practical consequences, no light capable of enlightening and perfecting it? Complaints, on the contrary, that can only harm it, that are useless even to the atheist, since they do not even touch upon the most fundamental truths and even prove them wrong? Complaints that are, finally, both ridiculous and disastrous coming from the mouth of the theist, since they can only succeed in depriving it of love while leaving it with fear? For my part, I know of nothing so contrary to the simplest lessons of common sense. But do you know, gentlemen, where this outpouring of insolent doctrines comes from, doctrines that judge God without ceremony and demand an accounting of His decrees? They come from that numerous phalanx we call *scholars*, whom we have failed to keep in their proper place in this century, which is second only to them. Formerly, there were very few scholars, and a very small number of those few were impious; today, we see nothing but *scholars.* It is a profession, a crowd, a people; and among them the exception, already so sad, has become the rule. On all sides they have usurped boundless influence; and yet, if there is one thing certain in the world, it is, in my opinion, that it is not science's role to guide humankind. Nothing necessary is entrusted to it: one would have to be out of one's mind to believe that God charged academies with teaching us what He is and what we owe Him. It belongs to prelates, nobles, and high-ranking officials of the State to be the custodians and guardians of conservative truths; to teach nations what is evil and what is good; what is true and what is false in the moral and spiritual order: others have no right to reason on these kinds of matters; they have the natural sciences to amuse themselves with: what could they possibly complain about? As for anyone who speaks or writes to deny the people a national dogma, they should be hanged like a domestic thief. Even Rousseau agreed to this, without considering what he himself would be asking for. Why was it so imprudent to grant everyone a voice? That is what has ruined us. Philosophers (or those called such) all possess a certain fierce and rebellious pride that tolerates nothing: they detest, without exception, all distinctions they do not enjoy; there is no authority that does not displease them; there is nothing above them that they do not hate. Let them have their way, and they will attack everything, even God, because He is master. Consider whether these are not the same men who have written against kings and against the one who established them! Ah! If only when the earth is finally settled...

THE SENATOR

A strange quirk of the weather! After a scorching day, the wind has suddenly turned so cold that the place is unbearable. I wouldn't want a man in his heat on this terrace; I wouldn't even want to give a heated speech here. It would be enough to make someone lose their voice. Until tomorrow, then, my good friends.

END OF THE EIGHTH INTERVIEW

NINTH INTERVIEW

THE SENATOR

Well, Count, are you ready on this issue you were talking about yesterday?

THE COUNT

I will leave nothing out, gentlemen, to satisfy you, to the best of my ability; but allow me first to point out that all sciences have mysteries, and that they present certain points where the most seemingly obvious theory contradicts experience. Politics, for example, offers several proofs of this truth. What is more extravagant in theory than hereditary monarchy? We judge this by experience; but if one had never heard of government, and had to choose one, one would consider a madman who deliberated between hereditary and elective monarchy. However, we know, I say, from experience, that the former is, all things considered, the best one can imagine and the latter the worst. What arguments cannot be amassed to establish that sovereignty comes from the people! Yet this is not the case. Sovereignty is always *taken*, never *given*; And a second, deeper theory then reveals that it must be so. Who would not say that the best political constitution is that which has been deliberated and written by statesmen perfectly aware of the nation's character, and who have foreseen every eventuality? Nevertheless, nothing could be further from the truth. The best-constituted people is the one that has written the fewest constitutional laws; and every written constitution is *null and void*. You have not forgotten that day when Professor P... railed so vehemently here against the venality of offices established in France. I do not believe, in fact, that there is anything more revolting at first glance, and yet it was not difficult to make even the professor perceive the fallacy that considered venality *in itself*, instead of considering it only as a means of *heredity*; and I had the pleasure of convincing you that a hereditary magistracy was the best thing one could imagine in France.

Therefore, let us not be surprised if, in other branches of our knowledge, especially in metaphysics and natural history, we encounter propositions which completely scandalize our reason, and which are nevertheless subsequently demonstrated by the most solid reasoning.

Among these proposals, one of the most important must undoubtedly be the one I merely stated yesterday: *that the righteous suffer voluntarily does not satisfy only himself, but also the guilty, who could not acquit himself*.

Instead of speaking to you myself, or if you prefer, before speaking to you myself on this great subject, allow me, gentlemen, to quote two writers who have each dealt with it in their own way, and who, without ever having read or known each other, have met with a surprising agreement.

The first is an English gentleman named Jennyngs, who died in 1787, a distinguished man in every respect, and who earned considerable renown for a very short but quite substantial work entitled: * *An Examination of the Intrinsic Evidence of Christianity* *. I know of no work more original or more profoundly thought out. The second is the anonymous author of * *Considerations on France* *, first published in 1794. He was a contemporary of Jennyngs for a long time, but had never heard of him or his book before 1803: this you can be perfectly certain of. I have no doubt that you will listen with pleasure to the reading of two pieces so singular in their harmony.

THE KNIGHT

Do you have these two books? I would gladly read them, especially the first one, which has everything I need, since it is very good without being long.

THE COUNT

I own neither of these two works, but you can see from here these immense volumes lying on my desk. It is there that, for more than thirty years, I have written down everything that my reading presents to me as most striking. Sometimes I limit myself to simple indications; other times I transcribe essential passages word for word; often I accompany them with a few notes, and often, too, I jot down those fleeting thoughts, those *sudden illuminations* that fade away fruitlessly if the flash is not captured by writing. Carried by the revolutionary whirlwind to various parts of Europe, these collections have never abandoned me; and now you cannot imagine with what pleasure I peruse this immense collection. Each passage awakens in me a host of interesting ideas and melancholy memories a thousand times sweeter than anything we are accustomed to calling *pleasures*. I see pages dated from Geneva, Rome, Venice, Lausanne. I cannot encounter the names of these cities without recalling those of the excellent friends I left there, who once comforted me in my exile. Some are no longer with us, but their memory is sacred to me. Often I come across pages written at my dictation by a beloved child whom the storm separated from me. Alone in this solitary room, I reach out to him, and I think I hear him calling to me in turn. A certain date reminds me of that moment when, on the banks of a river astonished to find itself frozen over, I ate with a French bishop a dinner we had prepared ourselves. That day I was cheerful; I had the strength to laugh

softly with the excellent man who awaits me today in a better world; But the previous night, I had spent it at anchor on an open boat, in the middle of a deep night, without fire or light, sitting on chests with my whole family, unable to lie down or even lean on anything for a moment, hearing only the sinister cries of some boatmen who kept threatening us, and being able to spread over our beloved heads only a miserable mat to protect them from the melting snow that fell relentlessly...

But, good God! What am I saying, and where am I going astray? Sir, you are closer; would you please take volume B of my collections, and without answering me, read first the passage from Jennyngs, as being the earliest: you will find it on page 525. I placed the bookmark this morning.

– Indeed, here it is right away.

View of the evidence of the Christian religion considered in itself by Mr. Jennyngs, translated by Mr. Le Tourneur. Paris, 1769, in-12. Conclusion, no. 4, p. 517.

“Our reason cannot assure us that some suffering of individuals is not necessary for happiness at all; it cannot demonstrate to us that crime and punishment do not arise from necessity; that they cannot for this reason be imposed upon us and levied as a tax on the common good, or that this tax cannot be paid by one being as well as by another, and that, consequently, if it is offered voluntarily, it cannot justly be accepted from the innocent in place of the guilty… As soon as we do not know the source of evil, we cannot judge what is or is not the effective and appropriate remedy. It is noteworthy that, despite the apparent absurdity of this doctrine, it has nevertheless been universally adopted in all ages.” As far back as history can take our research into the most remote times, we see all nations, both civilized and barbaric, despite the vast differences that separate them in all their religious opinions, united on this point and believed in the advantage of appeasing their offended gods through sacrifices, that is, through the substitution of the sufferings of other men and animals. This notion could never have derived from reason, since it contradicts it; nor from ignorance, which could never have invented such an inexplicable expedient; nor from the artifice of kings and priests seeking to dominate the people. This doctrine has no connection whatsoever with that end. We find it planted in the minds of the most remote savages discovered today, who have neither kings nor priests. It must therefore derive from a natural instinct or a supernatural revelation. And both are equally operations of divine power... Christianity has revealed to us several important truths of which we previously had no knowledge, and among these truths this one... *that God is willing to accept the sufferings of Christ as an expiation for the sins of humankind*... This truth is no less intelligible than this one... *One man discharges the debts of another*. But... why God accepts these punishments, or to what ends they may serve, is what Christianity remains silent about; and this silence is wise. A thousand instructions could not have enabled us to understand these mysteries, and consequently it does not require us to know or believe anything about the form of these mysteries.

I am now going to read the other passage taken from *Considerations on France*, 2nd $^{\text{edition}}$, London, 1797, in-8°, ch. III, p. 23.

"I feel well that, in all these considerations, we are continually assailed by the tiresome picture of innocent people perishing with the guilty; but without delving into this question which is at the heart of everything, we can consider it only in its relation to the universal dogma, as old as the world, *of the reversibility of the sufferings of the innocent for the benefit of the guilty*.

"It was from this dogma, it seems to me, that the ancients derived the use of sacrifices which they practiced throughout the world, and which they judged useful not only to the living, but also to the dead; a typical practice which habit makes us consider without astonishment, but whose root is no less difficult to reach.

“The *devotions*, so famous in antiquity, still stemmed from the same dogma. Decius had the *faith* that the sacrifice of his life would be accepted by the divinity, and that he could balance all the evils that threatened his country.”

“Christianity came to consecrate this dogma which is infinitely natural to man, although it seems difficult to arrive at it through reasoning.

"Thus, there may have been in the heart of Louis XVI, in that of the heavenly Elisabeth, such a movement, such an acceptance, capable of saving France.

"Sometimes people ask what the purpose is of these terrible austerities practiced by certain religious orders, which are also acts of *devotion*: it would be just as valid to ask what the purpose is of Christianity, since it rests entirely on this same enlarged dogma, of *innocence paying for crime*.

"The authority that approves these orders chooses a few men and isolates them from the world to make them into *leaders*."

“There is only violence in the universe; but we are corrupted by modern philosophy, which tells us that *all is good*, while evil has tainted everything, and that in a very true sense, *all is evil*, since nothing is in its proper place. The tonic note of the system of our creation having fallen, all the others have fallen proportionally, according to the rules of harmony. *All beings groan* and strive with effort and pain towards another order of things.”

I am persuaded, gentlemen, that you will not be astonished to see two writers who were completely unknown to each other meet to this extent, and you will no doubt be inclined to believe that two instruments which could not understand each other could only find themselves in strict agreement because they were, each taken separately, in agreement with a superior instrument which sets the tone for them.

Men have never doubted that innocence could not satisfy for crime; and they have believed moreover that there was in blood an expiatory force; so that life, which is blood, could redeem another *life*.

Examine this belief closely, and you will see that if God himself had not placed it in the mind of man, it could never have begun. The grand words of *superstition* and *prejudice* explain nothing; for there has never been a universal and constant error. If a false opinion reigns among one people, you will not find it among their neighbors; or if it sometimes seems to spread—I do not say over the whole globe, but over a great many peoples—time erases it in the process.

But the belief I am speaking of admits no exception of time or place. Ancient and modern nations, civilized or barbaric nations, eras of science or simplicity, true or false religions, there is not a single dissonance in the universe.

Finally, the idea of *sin* and that of *sacrifice for sin* had become so intertwined in the minds of ancient peoples that the Holy Language expressed both with the same word. Hence the well-known Hebraism, used by Saint Paul, *that the Savior was made sin for us*.

This theory of sacrifice is also linked to the inexplicable practice of circumcision among so many ancient nations; a practice that the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael perpetuate before our very eyes with an equally inexplicable consistency, and which navigators of recent centuries have rediscovered in the Pacific archipelago (namely in Tahiti), in Mexico, Dominica, and in North America, as far north as the 30th parallel. Some nations may have varied in their methods; but always one finds *a painful and bloody operation performed on the reproductive organs*. That is to say: *anathema upon humankind*, and salvation through blood.

Humankind had professed these dogmas since its fall, when the great victim, *raised up to draw people to itself*, cried out on Calvary:

EVERYTHING IS CONSUMED

Then, with the veil of the temple torn, the great secret of the sanctuary was revealed, as far as it could be known in this order of things to which we belong. We understood why humankind had always believed that one soul could be saved by another, and why it had always sought its regeneration in blood.

Without Christianity, man does not know what he is, because he finds himself isolated in the universe and cannot compare himself to anything; the first service that religion renders him is to show him what he is worth, by showing him what he has cost.

Look at me, it's God who's killing a god.

Yes! Let us look at it closely, friends who listen to me! And we will see everything in this sacrifice: the enormity of the crime that demanded such expiation; the inconceivable greatness of the being who could commit

it; the infinite value of the victim who said: *Here I am!*

Now, if we consider, on the one hand, that all this ancient doctrine was merely the prophetic cry of humankind, announcing salvation through blood, and that, on the other hand, Christianity came to justify this prophecy, putting reality in place of the type, so that the innate and radical dogma has never ceased to announce the great sacrifice which is the basis of the new revelation, and that this revelation, sparkling with all the rays of truth, in turn proves the divine origin of the dogma which we constantly perceive as a point of light in the midst of the darkness of paganism, one of the most compelling proofs imaginable results from this agreement.

But these truths cannot be proven by calculation or by the laws of motion. He who has spent his life without ever having tasted divine things; he who has narrowed his mind and withered his heart with sterile speculations that can neither make him better in this life nor prepare him for the next; he, I say, will reject these kinds of proofs, and indeed, he will understand nothing of them. There are truths that man can grasp only with the *spirit of his heart*. More than once, a good man is shaken to see people whose wisdom he esteems refuse proofs that seem clear to him: it is pure illusion. These people lack common sense, and that is all. When the most capable man lacks religious understanding, not only can we not overcome him, but we have no means of making ourselves understood by him, which proves nothing but his misfortune. Everyone knows the story of the man born blind who, through reflection, discovered *that crimson was infinitely similar to the sound of a trumpet*; now, whether this blind man was a fool or a *Saunderson*, what does it matter to someone who knows what crimson is?

Greater detail would be needed to delve deeper into the interesting subject of sacrifices; but I might be abusing your patience, and I myself fear losing my way. There are points that, to be thoroughly addressed, require all the calm of a written discussion. I believe, at least, my good friends, that we know enough about the sufferings of the righteous. This world is a militia, an eternal struggle. All those who have fought bravely in a battle are undoubtedly worthy of praise; but undoubtedly, too, the greatest glory belongs to the one who returns wounded. You have not forgotten, I am sure, what a witty man whom I love with all my heart told us the other day. " *I do not at all* share," he said, " *the opinion of Seneca, who was not at all surprised if God occasionally granted Himself the pleasure of contemplating a great man grappling with adversity." For my part, I confess, I don't understand how God can amuse himself by tormenting honest people*. Perhaps with this philosophical jest he would have embarrassed Seneca; but for us, it would hardly embarrass us. There is no such thing as *perfect justice*, as we have so often said; but if there is a man *just enough* to merit the favor of his Creator, who could be surprised that God, ATTENTIVE TO HIS OWN WORK, takes pleasure in perfecting him? The father of a family may laugh at a rude servant who swears or lies; but his tenderly severe hand rigorously punishes these same faults in his only son, whose life he would gladly redeem for his own. If tenderness forgives nothing, it is so that it has nothing left to forgive. By placing the righteous man in the grip of misfortune, God purifies him of his past sins, warns him against future transgressions, and prepares him for heaven. Doubtless, *He delights* in seeing him escape the inevitable justice that awaited him in another world. Is there a greater joy for love than the resignation that disarms it? And when one considers, moreover, that his sufferings are not only beneficial to the righteous, but that they can, through holy acceptance, turn to the advantage of the guilty, and that in suffering thus he truly *sacrifices* for all humankind, one will agree that it is indeed impossible to imagine a spectacle more worthy of the divine.

One more word on these sufferings of the *righteous*. Do you happen to believe that the viper is only a venomous animal when it bites, and that the man afflicted with epilepsy is only truly epileptic at the moment of the attack?

THE SENATOR

So where are you going with this, my worthy friend?

THE COUNT

I won't go into too much detail, as you'll see. The man who knows man only by his actions only declares him *wicked* when he sees him commit a crime. Yet, that would be as much as believing that a viper's venom is generated at the moment of the bite. Opportunity doesn't make the wicked person; it merely reveals them. But God, who sees all, God, who knows our inclinations and our innermost thoughts far better than men know one another materially, employs punishment as a remedy, and strikes down that man who appears healthy to us in order

to eradicate the evil before it reaches its peak. We often find ourselves, in our blind impatience, complaining about the slowness of providence in punishing crimes; and, in a singular contradiction, we still accuse it when its benevolent reputation represses vicious inclinations before they have produced crimes. Sometimes God spares a known culprit because punishment would be pointless, while He punishes the hidden culprit because that punishment must save a man. Similarly, the wise physician avoids burdening a hopeless patient with unnecessary remedies and operations. " *Leave him*," he says, withdrawing, *"amuse him, give him everything he asks for*." But if the nature of things allowed him to see clearly in the body of a man, seemingly perfectly healthy, the germ of the illness that will kill him tomorrow or in ten years, wouldn't he advise him to submit, in order to escape death, to the most disgusting remedies and the most painful operations? And if the coward preferred death to pain, wouldn't the physician, whose eye and hand we assume to be equally infallible, advise his friends to bind him and keep him, against his will, with his family? These surgical instruments, whose sight makes us pale—the saw, the trepan, the forceps, the lithotome, and so on—were surely not invented by a genius hostile to humankind. Indeed, these instruments are in the hand of man, for the healing of physical ailments, what physical ailments are in the hand of God for the eradication of true evil. Can a dislocated or fractured limb be set without pain? Can a wound, an internal disease, be cured without abstinence, without deprivation of every kind, without a more or less tiring regimen? How many remedies are there in the entire pharmacopoeia that do not offend our senses? Is suffering, even immediately caused by illness, anything other than the effort of life defending itself? In the sensible order as in the higher order, the law is the same and as old as evil: THE REMEDY FOR DISORDER WILL BE PAIN.

THE KNIGHT

As soon as I have written this interview, I want to have it read by that mutual friend you mentioned to me recently; I am convinced he will find your reasons sound, which will please you greatly, since you are so fond of him. If I am not mistaken, he will even believe that you have added to Seneca's arguments, who must have been a truly great genius, for he is quoted everywhere. I recall that my first drafts were taken from a small book entitled *Seneca the Christian*, which contained only the philosopher's own words. This man must have been quite influential to have been given such an honor. I therefore held him in rather high esteem, until La Harpe came and disrupted all my ideas with an entire volume of his Lyceum, filled with scathing pronouncements against Seneca. I confess, however, that I still lean towards the opinion of the servant in the comedy:

This Aeneas, sir, was a truly great man!

THE COUNT

You are quite right, Sir Knight, not to change your mind. I know by heart everything that has been said against Seneca; but there are also many things to say in his favor. Just be careful that the greatest fault attributed to him or his style does not work to the advantage of his readers; undoubtedly, he is too affected, too sententious; undoubtedly, he strives too much to say nothing like everyone else: but with his original turns of phrase, with his unexpected insights, he penetrates minds deeply.

And everything he says leaves a lasting impression.

I know of no author (Tacitus perhaps excepted) who is more remembered. Considering only the substance of his work, he has invaluable passages; his epistles are a treasure trove of morality and sound philosophy. There are some of these epistles that Bourdaloue or Massillon could have recited from the pulpit with only slight alterations. His *natural questions* are undoubtedly the most precious piece that antiquity has bequeathed to us in this genre. He wrote a fine treatise on *Providence*, a concept that was still unnamed in Rome during Cicero's time. It would be entirely up to me to cite him on a multitude of questions that had not been addressed or even considered by his predecessors. However, despite his considerable merit, I may be permitted to admit without pride that I have been able to add to his arguments. For in this, my only merit is having benefited from greater assistance. And I also believe, to tell you the truth, that he is superior to those who preceded him only for the same reason, and that if he

had not been held back by the prejudices of century, country and state, he could have told us almost everything I have told you; for everything leads me to judge that he had a fairly thorough knowledge of our dogmas.

THE SENATOR

Would you perhaps believe in Seneca's Christianity or in his epistolary correspondence with Saint Paul?

THE COUNT

I am far from supporting either of these two facts; but I believe they have a true basis, and I am certain that Seneca heard Saint Paul, just as I am certain that you are listening to me now. Born and living in the light, we are ignorant of its effects on the person who has never seen it. When the Portuguese brought Christianity to India, the Japanese, who are the most intelligent people in Asia, were so struck by this new doctrine, of which fame had, however, only very imperfectly informed them, that they sent two members of their two principal academies to Goa to learn about this new religion; and soon Japanese ambassadors came to request Christian preachers from the Viceroy of India; so that, incidentally, there was never anything more peaceful, more legal, and free than the introduction of Christianity into Japan: a fact profoundly ignored by many who presume to speak of it. But the Romans and Greeks of Augustus's time were very different men than the Japanese of the 16th century. We do not sufficiently reflect on the effect that Christianity must have had on a multitude of good minds of that era. The Roman governor of Caesarea, *who knew very well what this doctrine was*, saying in fear to Saint Paul, " *That is enough for now, leave,* " and the Areopagites, who told him, " *We will hear you again on these matters*," were unwittingly praising his prediction. When Agrippa, after hearing Saint Paul, said to him, " *You are almost convincing me to become a Christian*," the Apostle replied, " *Would to God that it were not so, and that you and all who hear me might become like me*, except for these chains," and he showed his chains. After eighteen centuries have passed over these sacred pages; after a hundred readings of this beautiful response, *I feel as though I am reading it for the first time.*How noble, gentle, ingenious, and insightful it seems to me! I cannot express how deeply moved I am. D'Alembert's heart, though hardened by pride and a cold philosophy, could not withstand this discourse: imagine the effect it must have had on his listeners. Let us remember that people of old were made just like us. King Agrippa, Queen Berenice, proconsuls Sergius and Gallio (the former of whom converted to Christianity), governors Felix and Faustus, tribune Lysias, and all their entourage had relatives, friends, and correspondents. They spoke, they wrote. A thousand mouths repeated what we read today, and this news made all the more impression because it presented, as proof of the doctrine, undeniable miracles, even today, for any dispassionate person. Saint Paul preached for a year and a half in Corinth and two years in Ephesus; everything that happened in these great cities resonated in the blink of an eye as far as Rome. But finally, the great apostle arrived in Rome itself, *where he remained for two whole years, receiving all who came to see him, and preaching freely without anyone hindering him*. Do you think such preaching could have escaped Seneca, who was then sixty years old? And when, later, brought before the courts at least twice for the doctrine he taught, Paul defended himself publicly and was acquitted, do you think these events did not make his preaching both more famous and more powerful? All those with the slightest knowledge of antiquity know that Christianity, in its infancy, was for Christians an *initiation*, and for others a *system*, a philosophical or theurgic *sect*. Everyone knows how eager people were then for new opinions: it's inconceivable that Seneca was unaware of the teachings of Saint Paul; and this is further demonstrated by reading his works, where he speaks of God and humanity in a completely new way. Next to the passage in his epistles where he states that *God must be honored and* loved, an unknown hand once wrote in the margin of the copy I'm using: *"Deum amati vix alii auctores dixerunt" (Some authors say that* God is loved). The expression is, at the very least, extremely rare and remarkable.

Pascal very rightly observed that *no religion other than our own has asked God to love it;* whereupon I recall that Voltaire, in the shameful commentary he added to the thoughts of this famous man, objects that *Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus speak* CONTINUOUSLY *of loving God*. Why did this fine scholar not deign to quote the passages for us? Nothing would have been easier, since, according to him, they are closely related. But let us return to Seneca. Elsewhere he said: *My Gods*, and even *our God and our father*; he stated explicitly: *May God's will be done*. We will pass over these expressions, but look for similar ones among the philosophers who preceded him, and especially in Cicero, who treated precisely the same subjects. You do not, I hope, require further quotations from my memory at this moment; But read Seneca's works, and you will feel the truth of what I have

the honor to tell you. I flatter myself that when you come across certain passages, of which I have only a vague recollection, where he speaks of the incredible heroism of certain men who braved the most horrible torments with an intrepidity that seems to surpass the strength of humanity, you will hardly doubt that he had the Christians in mind.

Moreover, the tradition concerning Seneca's Christianity and his relationship with Saint Paul, while not decisive, is nevertheless something more than nothing, especially when combined with other presumptions.

Finally, Christianity, barely born, had taken root in the capital of the world. The apostles had preached in Rome twenty-five years before the reign of Nero. Saint Peter conversed there with Philo: such conferences necessarily produced great effects. When we hear talk of Judaism in Rome under the early emperors, and especially among the Romans themselves, it very often refers to Christians: nothing is so easy as to be mistaken. It is known that Christians, at least a considerable number of them, long believed themselves bound to observe certain points of Mosaic law; for example, the abstinence from bloodshed. Well into the fourth century, we still see Christians martyred in Persia for refusing to violate legal observances. It is therefore not surprising that they were often confused, and you will indeed see Christians lumped together with Jews in the persecution that the latter brought upon themselves by their revolt against the Emperor Hadrian. One must have keen eyesight and a very sharp eye; one must also look very closely to discern the two religions in the authors of the first two centuries. Plutarch, for example, whom is he referring to when, in his Treatise on Superstition, he exclaims: " *O Greeks! What have the barbarians done to you?"* and immediately goes on to speak of *Sabbaths*, prostrations, shameful squatting, and so on. Read the entire passage, and you will not know whether he is referring to Sunday or the Sabbath, whether you are contemplating a Jewish mourning or the first rudiments of canonical penance. For a long time, I saw in it only pure and simple Judaism; today I lean toward the opposite opinion. I would also quote Rutilius's verses on this subject, *if I remembered them, as* Madame de Sévigné says. I refer you to his account of his journey; there you will read of his bitter complaints *about this Jewish superstition that was gripping the whole world*. He blames Pompey and Titus for having conquered this unfortunate Judea, which was poisoning the world: but who could believe that this refers to Judaism? Was it not, on the contrary, Christianity that was seizing the world and equally rejecting Judaism and paganism? Here the facts speak for themselves; there is no room for argument.

Furthermore, gentlemen, I would readily suppose that you might well share Montaigne's opinion, and that a sure way to make you hate plausible things would be to *present* them as proven. Believe what you like on this particular question; but tell me, I beg you, do you think that Judaism alone was insufficient to influence the moral and religious system of a man as insightful as Seneca, who knew this religion perfectly? Let the poets who see only the surface of things speak, and who believe they have said it all when they have called the Jews **verpos* * and **recutitos* *, and whatever else you like. No doubt the great anathema already weighed upon them. But could one not then, as now, admire the writings while despising the people? With the Septuagint, Seneca could read the Bible as easily as we can. What must he have been thinking when he compared poetic theogonies to the first verse of Genesis, or when he likened Ovid's flood to Moses's? What an immense source of reflection! All ancient philosophy pales before the single book of *Wisdom*. No intelligent and unprejudiced person can read the Psalms without being struck with admiration and transported to a new world. Even with regard to the individuals themselves, there were great distinctions to be made. Philo and Josephus were certainly men of good company, and one could undoubtedly learn from them. In general, there was in this nation, even in the most ancient times, and long before its mingling with the Greeks, far more learning than is commonly believed, for reasons that would not be difficult to pinpoint. Where, for example, did they get their calendar, one of the most accurate, and perhaps the most accurate, of antiquity? Newton, in his chronology, did not disdain to give him full credit, and it is entirely up to us to admire him even today, since we see him progressing alongside modern nations, without error or difficulty of any kind. We can see, from the example of Daniel, how highly regarded the skilled men of this nation were in Babylon, which certainly possessed great knowledge. The renowned Rabbi *Moses Maimonides*, some of whose translated works I have read, informs us that at the end of the great captivity, a great many Jews refused to return home; they settled in Babylon; they enjoyed the greatest freedom and the highest esteem there, and the safekeeping of the most secret archives in Ecbatana was entrusted to men chosen from among that nation.

While leafing through my little *Elzevirs the other day, which you see there arranged in a circle on this rotating tray, I happened upon Peter Cuneus* 's Hebrew Republic. It reminded me of that curious anecdote of Aristotle, who conversed in Asia with a Jew beside whom the most distinguished scholars of Greece seemed like barbarians.

The translation of the sacred books into a language that had become the language of the world, the dispersion of the Jews throughout the globe, and humanity's natural curiosity for all that is new and extraordinary, had spread the Mosaic Law far and wide, thus making it an introduction to Christianity. For a long time, Jews had served in the armies of several princes who readily employed them because of their recognized valor and unparalleled loyalty. Alexander, in particular, benefited greatly from this and showed them great consideration. His successors on the throne of Egypt imitated him in this respect and consistently demonstrated great trust in the Jews. Lagus placed the strongest fortresses in Egypt under their guard, and, to preserve the cities he had conquered in Libya, he found no better solution than to send Jewish colonies there. One of the Ptolemies, his successors, sought to obtain a formal translation of the sacred books. Euergetes, after conquering Syria, came to Jerusalem to give thanks: he offered God a great number of sacrifices and made rich gifts to the temple. Philometor and Cleopatra entrusted the government of the kingdom and the command of the army to two men from that nation. In short, everything justified Tobias's speech to his brothers: *God has scattered you among the nations who do not know him, so that you may make known to them his wonders; so that you may teach them that he is the only God and the only Almighty*.

According to ancient ideas, which admitted a multitude of deities, especially national gods, the God of Israel was, for the Greeks, the Romans, and indeed all other nations, simply another deity added to the existing hierarchy; which was not at all shocking. But since there is always a hidden force in truth stronger than all prejudices, the new God, wherever he appeared, was bound to make a great impression on many minds. I have briefly cited a few examples, and I could cite others. The court of the Roman emperors held the Temple in Jerusalem in high esteem. When Gaius Agrippa passed through Judea *without paying his respects there* (if you will pardon the expression?), his ancestor, the Emperor Augustus, was extremely angered; and what is truly remarkable is that a terrible famine which afflicted Rome at that time was regarded by public opinion as punishment for this transgression. In a kind of reparation, or perhaps in a spontaneous gesture even more honorable for him, Augustus, though generally a great and constant enemy of foreign religions, ordered that sacrifices be offered daily at his expense on the altar in Jerusalem. His wife, Livia, presented considerable gifts there. This was the fashion at court, and the practice had reached the point where all nations, even those least friendly to Judaism, feared to offend it, lest they displease their ruler; and any man who dared to touch the sacred book of the Jews, or the money they sent to Jerusalem, would have been considered and punished as a sacrilege. Augustus's good sense must undoubtedly have been struck by the way the Jews conceived of the Divine. Tacitus, through singular blindness, praised this doctrine to the skies while believing he was condemning it in a famous text; But nothing impressed me so much as Tiberius's astonishing sagacity concerning the Jews. Sejanus, who detested them, would have liked to cast suspicion upon them of a conspiracy that would destroy them: Tiberius paid no heed to this, for, said this penetrating prince, *this nation, on principle, will never lay a hand on a sovereign*. These Jews, whom we imagine as a fierce and intolerant people, were nevertheless, in certain respects, the most tolerant of all, to the point that it is sometimes difficult to understand how the exclusive teachers of truth could be so accommodating to foreign religions. We know of their entirely *liberal approach*whose moral dilemma Elisha resolved, a dilemma posed by a captain of the Syrian guard. Had the prophet been a Jesuit, Pascal, for this decision, would undoubtedly have included it, albeit mistakenly, in his Provincial Letters. Philo, if I am not mistaken, observes somewhere that the high priest of the Jews, alone in the world, prayed for foreign nations and powers. Indeed, I do not believe there is any other example of this in antiquity. The Temple in Jerusalem was surrounded by a portico intended for foreigners who came there to pray freely. A multitude of these *Gentiles* trusted in this God (*whoever he might be*) who was worshipped on Mount Zion. No one hindered them or questioned them about their national beliefs, and we still see them, in the Gospel, coming to Jerusalem on the solemn day of Passover to worship, without the slightest sign of disapproval or surprise from the sacred historian.

The human mind having been sufficiently prepared or warned by this noble worship, Christianity appeared; and, almost at the moment of its birth, it was known and preached in Rome. This is enough for me to be justified in asserting that Seneca's superiority over his predecessors—and, incidentally, I would say the same of Plutarch—in all matters that truly concern humankind, can only be attributed to his more or less perfect knowledge of Mosaic and Christian dogmas. Truth is made for our intellect as light is for our eye; both insinuate themselves effortlessly and without instruction from us, whenever they are within reach. From the moment Christianity appeared in the world, a noticeable change occurred in the writings of even its enemies or those indifferent to it. All these writings have, if I may put it this way, *a character* that the works preceding this great era did not possess. If human reason wishes to demonstrate its strength, let it seek proof before our era; let it not beat its nurse; and, as it has so often

done, cite what it claims to have received from revelation, to prove to us that it has no need of it. Allow me, I beg you, to remind you of an ineffable trait of this *madman of the grand type* (as Buffon calls him), who so greatly influenced a century well worthy of listening to him. Rousseau proudly tells us in his *Emile that the necessity of revelation is vainly argued against him, since God has revealed everything to our eyes, to our conscience, and to our judgment: that God wishes to be worshipped* IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH, *and that all the rest is merely a matter of policing*. There, gentlemen, is what is called reasoning! *To worship God in spirit and in truth!* It is a trifle, no doubt! It took only God to teach it to us.

When a *maid* used to ask us, " *Why did God put us in this world?"* we would answer, " *To know Him, to love Him, to serve Him in this life, and thus merit His rewards in the next."* See how this answer, which is within the grasp of early childhood, is nevertheless so admirable, so astounding, so undeniably beyond anything that all human knowledge combined has ever been able to imagine; that the divine seal is as visible on this line of elementary catechism as on the Song of Mary, or on the most penetrating oracles of the Sermon on the Mount.

We should therefore not be surprised if this divine doctrine, more or less known to Seneca, produced in his writings a host of noteworthy features. I hope that this little discussion, which we have, so to speak, stumbled upon along the way, has not bored you.

As for La Harpe, whom I had completely lost track of, what can I say? In recognition of his talents, his noble resolve, his sincere repentance, and his unwavering perseverance, let us overlook all that he said about things he didn't understand, or that stirred up some lingering passion within him. *May he rest in peace!* And we too, gentlemen, shall *rest in peace*; we have overindulged today, for it is two o'clock: however, we must not regret it. Not all the evenings in this great city have been as innocent, nor consequently as happy, as ours. *Let us therefore rest in peace!* And may this tranquil sleep, preceded and brought about by useful labors and innocent pleasures, be the image and the pledge of that endless rest which is granted only to a succession of days gone by, just as the hours that have just passed for us do!

END OF THE NINTH INTERVIEW

TENTH INTERVIEW

THE SENATOR

Tell us, Sir Knight, if you did not dream of sacrifices last night?

THE KNIGHT

Yes, no doubt, I've dreamt about it; and since it's a completely new country for me, I still only see things in a confused way. It seems to me, however, that the subject is very worthy of further exploration, and if I'm to believe that inner feeling we were discussing one day, our mutual friend truly opened up a rich mine in our last conversation, a mine that now simply needs to be exploited.

THE SENATOR

This is precisely what I wanted to discuss with you today. It seems to me, Count, that you have placed the principle of sacrifice above all attack, and that you have drawn a host of useful conclusions from it. I also believe that the theory of *reversibility* is so natural to humankind that it can be considered an *innate* truth in the fullest sense of the term, since it is absolutely impossible for us to have learned it. But do you believe it would be equally impossible to *discover*, or even *glimpse*, the reason for this universal dogma?

The more we examine the universe, the more we are inclined to believe that evil stems from a certain division we cannot explain, and that the return to good depends on an opposing force that constantly pushes us toward a certain unity that is equally inconceivable. This community of merits, this reversibility that you have so clearly

demonstrated, can only arise from this unity that we do not understand. Reflecting on general belief and on the natural instinct of humankind, one is struck by their tendency to unite things that nature seems to have completely separated: they are very inclined, for example, to regard a people, a city, a corporation, but especially a family, as a single, moral entity, possessing its good and bad qualities, capable of merit or demerit, and consequently susceptible to punishments and rewards. From this comes the *prejudice*, or to speak more precisely, the *dogma* of nobility, so universal and so deeply rooted among humankind. If you subject it to the examination of reason, it does not withstand the test; for there is no distinction, if we consult only reasoning, that is more foreign to us than that which we hold from our ancestors: however there is none more esteemed, nor even more readily recognized, outside the time of factions, and even then the attacks which are made against it are still an indirect homage and a formal recognition of that greatness which one would like to annihilate.

If glory is hereditary in the opinion of all men, then blame is likewise, and for the same reason. People sometimes ask, without giving it much thought, why the shame of a crime or a punishment should fall upon the posterity of the guilty party; and those who ask this question then boast of the merit of their ancestors: this is a clear contradiction.

THE KNIGHT

I had never noticed this analogy.

THE SENATOR

It is, however, striking. One of your ancestors, Sir Knight (I take great pleasure in reminding you of this), was killed in Egypt in the service of Saint Louis; another perished at the Battle of Marignano while contesting an enemy flag; and finally, your last ancestor lost an arm at Fontenoy. You doubtless do not believe that this illustriousness is foreign to you, and you will not disavow me if I assert that you would sooner renounce life than the glory that prevents you from achieving these noble deeds. But consider that if your 13th ¯ century ancestor had betrayed Saint Louis to the Saracens instead of dying at his side, this infamy would be common to you for the same reason and with the same justice that has bequeathed to you an infamy as personal as the crime itself, if we were to believe only our limited reasoning. There is no middle ground, Sir Knight; one must either accept shame gracefully, if it befalls you, or renounce glory. Therefore, the opinion on this point is not in doubt. Regarding hereditary dishonor, there is no one more unbelieving than the one who suffers from it: and this judgment is clearly invalid. To those who, for the sole pleasure of showing wit and contradicting received ideas, speak, or even write books, against what they call *chance* or the *prejudice* of birth, suggest, if they have a name or even just honor, that they marry into a family disgraced in bygone days, and you will see what they reply.

As for those who have neither, since they would also be speaking for themselves, they should be allowed to speak.

Might this same theory not shed some light on the inconceivable mystery of the punishment of sons for the crimes of their fathers? Nothing is as jarring at first glance as a hereditary curse; yet why not, since a blessing is likewise hereditary? And beware that these ideas do not belong solely to the Bible, as is often imagined. This fortunate or unfortunate heredity is also found in all times and all places: it belongs to paganism as well as to Judaism or Christianity; to the infancy of the world as well as to ancient nations; it is found among theologians, philosophers, poets, in the theater, and in the Church.

The arguments that reason provides against this theory resemble Zeno's argument against the possibility of movement. We don't know how to respond, but we keep going. The family is undoubtedly composed of individuals who have nothing in common according to reason; but according to instinct and universal persuasion, every family is *one*.

It is above all in sovereign families that this unity shines brightest: the sovereign changes name and face; but he is always, as Spain says, I, THE KING. Your French, Monsieur le Chevalier, have two fine maxims, perhaps truer than they realize: one of civil law, *the dead seize the living*; and the other of public law, *the king does not die*. Therefore, one must never divide him in thought when it comes to judging him.

It is sometimes astonishing to see an innocent monarch perish miserably in one of those political catastrophes so frequent in the world. You doubtless do not believe that I wish to stifle compassion in people's hearts; and you know what recent crimes have caused my own heart to suffer. Nevertheless, strictly speaking, what does this mean? Every guilty person can be *innocent*, even *a saint,* on the day of their execution. There are crimes that are only completed and defined after a considerable period of time; there are others that consist of a multitude of acts, more or less excusable individually, but whose repetition ultimately becomes highly criminal. In these kinds of cases, it is evident that punishment cannot precede the completion of the crime.

Even in cases of instantaneous crimes, torture is always suspended and must remain so. This is yet another of those all-too-frequent occasions where human justice serves as an interpreter of that of which ours is but a reflection and a derivative.

A careless act, a moment of indiscretion, a violation of some police regulation, can be punished immediately; but as soon as it is a question of a crime proper, the guilty party is never punished at the very moment of their arrest. Under Islamic law, the authorities punish, even with death, the man they deem worthy at the moment and place they seize him; and these abrupt executions, which have not lacked blind admirers, are nevertheless one of the many proofs of the brutishness and condemnation of these peoples. Among us, the order is quite different: the guilty party must be arrested; they must be accused; they must defend themselves; above all, they must consider their conscience and their affairs; material preparations must be made for their execution; and finally, to take everything into account, a certain amount of time is needed to transport them to the place of punishment, which is fixed. The scaffold is an *altar*: it can therefore only be placed or moved by authority; and these delays, respectable even in their excesses, and which likewise do not lack blind detractors, are no less a proof of our superiority.

If, therefore, it should happen that, during the indispensable suspension that must occur between crime and punishment, sovereignty changes its name, what does it matter to justice? It must take its ordinary course. Even setting aside this unity that I am contemplating at this moment, nothing is more humanly just; for nowhere can the natural heir be spared paying the debts of the succession, unless he abstains. Sovereignty is responsible for all acts of sovereignty. All debts, all treaties, all crimes bind it. If, by some disordered act, it cultivates today an evil seed whose natural development will bring about a catastrophe in a hundred years, this blow will justly strike the crown *in a hundred years*. To escape this, it should have refused it. It is never THIS KING, it is THE KING who is innocent or guilty. Plato, I no longer remember where, perhaps in the *Gorgias*, said something appalling that I scarcely dare to think about; but if we understand his proposition in the sense I am now presenting to you, he might well be right. Centuries can pass precisely between a meritorious act and its reward, just as between a crime and its punishment. A king can only be born and die once: he lasts as long as the kingship itself. If he becomes guilty, he is dealt with accordingly: depending on the circumstances, he is warned, threatened, humiliated, suspended, imprisoned, tried, or sacrificed.

Having examined man, let us now examine what is most wondrous in him: the word. We will find the same mystery there, namely, an inexplicable division and an equally inexplicable tendency toward a certain unity. The two greatest epochs of the spiritual world are undoubtedly that of *Babel*, when languages were divided, and that of *Pentecost*, when they made a marvelous effort to reunite. It can even be observed in passing that the two most extraordinary prodigies mentioned in human history are, at the same time, the most certain facts of which we have any knowledge. To dispute them requires a lack of both reason and integrity.

This is how, since everything has been divided, everything desires reunion. Men, driven by this feeling, constantly demonstrate it in a thousand ways. They have, for example, wanted the word "union" to mean tenderness, and this very word " *tenderness* " signifies nothing more than the disposition toward union. All their signs of *attachment* (another word created by the same feeling) are material unions. They touch hands, they embrace. The mouth being the organ of speech, which is itself the organ and expression of intelligence, all men have believed that there is something sacred in the coming together of two human mouths, something that heralds the mingling of two souls. Vice seizes everything and makes use of everything, but I am examining only the principle.

Religion has brought the *kiss of peace* to the altar with full awareness: I even recall encountering, while leafing through the writings of the Holy Fathers, passages where they complain that crime dares to use a holy and mysterious sign to justify its excesses. But whether it satisfies effrontery, or frightens modesty, or laughs on the pure lips of the wife and mother, whence comes its widespread use and power?

Our mutual unity results from our unity in God, so celebrated by philosophy itself. Malebranche's system of *vision in God* is but a superb commentary on those well-known words of Saint Paul: *"In him we live and move and have our being*." The pantheism of the Stoics and that of Spinoza are a corruption of this great idea; but it is always the same principle, always this tendency toward unity. The first time I read in the great work of that admirable Malebranche, so neglected by his unjust and blind country, that *God is the abode of spirits as space is the abode of bodies*, I was dazzled by this flash of genius and ready to prostrate myself. Few men have said such beautiful things.

I once indulged the whim of leafing through the works of Madame Guyon solely because she had been recommended to me by my best friend, *François de Cambrai*. I came across a passage in her commentary on the *Song of Songs*, where this celebrated woman compares human intellect to flowing waters, all of which originate from the Ocean and are constantly stirred only to return to it. The comparison is quite apt; but you know that pieces of prose don't linger in the memory. Fortunately, I can compensate for this by reciting to you some inexpressibly beautiful verses by Metastasio, who translated Madame [Guyon], unless he somehow happened to meet her.

L'onda dal mar divisa
Bagna la valle e il monte:
Va passageriera in fiume;
Va prigioniera in fonte:
Mormora sempre e geme
Finche non torni al mar;

Al mar dove ella nacque,
Dove acquistó gli umori,
Dove d'a lunghi errori
Spera di riposar.

But all these waters cannot mingle with the Ocean without mingling together, at least in a way I don't understand at all. Sometimes I long to leap beyond the narrow confines of this world; I long to anticipate the day of revelations and plunge into the infinite. When the dual nature of man is erased, and these two centers are merged, he will be ONE: for, with no more struggle within him, where would he get the idea of duality? But, if we consider men in relation to one another, what will become of them when evil is annihilated, when there is no more passion or self-interest? What will become of the SELF, when all thoughts are common, like desires, when all minds see themselves as they are seen? Who can understand, who can imagine this celestial Jerusalem where all inhabitants, imbued with the same spirit, will permeate one another and reflect happiness back to each other? An infinite number of light spectra of the same size, if they happen to coincide exactly in the same place, are no longer an infinite number of light spectra; it is a single, infinitely luminous spectrum. I am careful, however, not to touch upon the concept of *personality*, without which immortality is nothing; but I cannot help being struck by how the entire universe leads us back to this mysterious unity.

Saint Paul invented a word that has passed into all Christian languages; it is that of *edifying*, which is very surprising at first glance: for what is there in common between the construction of a building and the good example that one gives to one's neighbor?

But we soon discover the root of this expression. Vice separates people, just as virtue unites them. There is no act against the order that does not give rise to a particular interest contrary to the general order; there is no pure act that does not sacrifice a particular interest to the general interest, that is to say, that does not tend to create a single, regular will in place of these myriad divergent and culpable wills. Saint Paul thus began with this fundamental idea: that we are all *God's building block; and that this building block that we must construct is the body of the*

Savior. He develops this idea in several ways. He wants us to build *one* another up; that is to say, that each person should voluntarily take their place as a stone in this spiritual edifice, and strive with all their might to call others to it, so that every person *may build up* and *be built up*. He especially utters this famous phrase: *"Science puffs up, but charity builds up*," an admirable saying, and strikingly true: for science, reduced to itself, divides instead of uniting, and all its constructions are merely appearances; whereas virtue truly *builds up*, and can even act without *building up*. Saint Paul had read in the sublime testament of his master that men are one and many like God; so that all *are completed and perfected in unity*, for until then the work is not finished. And how could there not be among us a certain unity (it will be whatever one wishes: one will call it whatever one wishes), since *a single man has lost us by a single act?* I am not here engaging in what is called *a circular argument* by proving unity by the origin of evil, and the origin of evil by unity: not at all; evil is all too clearly proven by itself; it is everywhere and especially within us. Now, of all the suppositions that can be imagined to explain its origin, none satisfies common sense, the enemy of quibbling, as much as this belief, which presents it as the hereditary result of a fundamental prevarication, and which has on its side the torrent of all human traditions.

The degradation of man can therefore be placed among the proofs of human unity, and help us to understand how, by the law of analogy, which governs all divine things, *salvation likewise* came through one.

You said the other day, Count, that there is no Christian dogma that is not supported by some universal tradition as ancient as humankind, or by some innate feeling that belongs to us as much as our very existence. Nothing could be truer. Have you never reflected on the importance that people have always attached to meals shared together? *The table*, says an old Greek proverb, *is the matchmaker of friendship*. No treaties, no agreements, no celebrations, no ceremonies of any kind, however somber, without a meal. Why is an invitation extended to a man who will dine just as well at his own home a matter of politeness? Why is it more honorable to sit at a prince's table than to sit elsewhere beside him? Descend from the palace of the European monarch to the hut of the cacique; pass from the highest civilization to the rudiments of society; Examine every rank, every condition, every character, and everywhere you will find meals arranged like a kind of religion, like a theory of respect, goodwill, etiquette, and often politics; a theory with its own laws, observances, and remarkable delicacies. Humankind has found no more expressive sign of unity than gathering together to partake of a common meal. This sign seemed to exalt unity to the point of unity. This sentiment being universal, religion chose it as the basis of its principal mystery; and since every meal, according to universal instinct, was a *communion* from the same cup, religion, in turn, desired that its *communion* be a *meal*. For spiritual life as for bodily life, nourishment is necessary. The same physical organ serves both. At this banquet, all people become ONE by being satiated with a food that is one, and that is all in all. The early Church Fathers, to make this transformation into unity tangible to a certain extent, readily drew their comparisons from the *ear* of corn and the *grape*, which are the very materials of the mystery. For just as many grains of wheat or grapes make a single loaf and a single drink, so too does this mystical bread and wine presented to us at the holy table shatter the self and absorb us into their inconceivable unity.

There are countless examples of this natural sentiment, legitimized and consecrated by religion, which one might regard as almost erased traces of a primitive state. Following this path, do you believe, Count, that it would have been absolutely impossible to form a certain idea of this solidarity that exists between men (you will permit me this legal term), from which arises the reversibility of merits that explains everything?

THE COUNT

It would be impossible for me, my respectable friend, to express to you, even imperfectly, the pleasure your discourse gave me; but, I confess to you with a frankness you so richly deserve, this pleasure is mingled with a certain dread. The path you are taking could too easily lead you astray, all the more so since you do not have, as I do, a beacon you can see in all weathers and from all distances. Is there not a certain temerity in wanting to understand things so far above us? Men have always been tempted by singular ideas that flatter pride: how sweet it is to walk along extraordinary paths that no human foot has ever trod! But what do we gain from it? Does man become better? For that is the crucial point. I ask further: does he become more learned? Why should we place our trust in these fine theories if they can lead us neither far nor straight? I do not refuse to see some very fine insights in all that you have just told us; but, once again, do we not run two great dangers, that of going astray in a disastrous way, and that of wasting precious time on vain speculations that we could employ in studies, and perhaps even in useful discoveries?

THE SENATOR

Quite the contrary, my dear Count: there is nothing so useful as those studies whose object is the intellectual world, and this is precisely the great road of discovery. Everything one can know in rational philosophy is found in a passage from Saint Paul, and here is that passage:

THIS WORLD IS A SYSTEM OF INVISIBLE THINGS

VISIBLY MANIFESTED.

The universe, Charles Bonnet said somewhere, *would therefore be nothing but an assemblage of appearances*.

Undoubtedly, at least in a certain sense; for there is a kind of idealism that is quite reasonable. It would be difficult, perhaps, to find a system of any renown that contains nothing true.

If you consider that everything has been made *by* and *for* intelligence; that every movement is an effect, so that the proper *cause* of a movement cannot be a movement; that these words *cause* and *matter* are mutually exclusive like those of *circle* and *triangle*, and that everything in this world that we see relates to another world that we do not see, you will easily feel that we do indeed live *in the midst of a system of invisible things manifested visibly*.

Explore the circle of sciences, and you will see that they all begin with a mystery. The mathematician fumbles over the basics of calculating imaginary quantities, even though his operations are quite accurate. He understands even less the principle of infinitesimal calculus, one of the most powerful instruments God has entrusted to humankind. He is astonished to draw infallible conclusions from a principle that defies common sense, and we have seen academies ask the learned world for an explanation of these apparent contradictions. The attractionist astronomer says *he is not at all concerned with knowing what attraction is, provided it is demonstrated that this force exists*; but, in his conscience, he is very concerned about it. The *germinalist*, who has just demolished the *epigeneticist* 's novels, stops deep in thought before the mule's ear: all his knowledge falters and his vision blurs. The physicist, having conducted Hales' experiment, now ponders the nature of plants, wood, and indeed, matter itself, and no longer dares to mock alchemists. But nothing is more interesting than what is happening today in the realm of chemistry. Pay close attention to the progress of these experiments, and you will see where the followers will be led. I sincerely honor their work; but I greatly fear that posterity will profit from it without gratitude and regard them as blind men who unwittingly arrived in a land whose existence they denied.

Therefore, there is no sensible law that does not have *behind it* (if you'll pardon the ridiculous expression) a spiritual law, of which the former is merely the visible expression; and that is why any explanation of cause by matter will never satisfy a sound mind. As soon as one leaves the realm of material and tangible experience and enters that of rational philosophy, one must leave matter behind and explain everything by metaphysics. I mean true metaphysics, and not that which has been cultivated with such fervor during the last century by men who were earnestly called *metaphysicians*. Jokes about metaphysicians! Who spent their lives proving that there is no metaphysics; illustrious brutes in whom genius was *animalized*!

It is therefore quite certain, my worthy friend, that one can only arrive by *those extraordinary routes* that you so fear. If I do not arrive, either because I lack strength, or because the authorities have erected barriers in my path, is it not already a crucial point to know that I am on the right track? All inventors, all original men, have been religious, even fervent, men. The human mind, corrupted by irreligious skepticism, resembles a wasteland that produces nothing, or that becomes covered with spontaneous plants, useless to humankind. Even its natural fertility is then a harm: for these plants, by mingling and intertwining their roots, harden the soil and form yet another barrier between heaven and earth. Break, break this cursed crust; destroy these deadly tenacious plants; summon all the strength of humankind; drive the plowshare into the ground; search deeply for the powers of the earth in order to bring them into contact with the powers of heaven.

This, gentlemen, is the natural image of human intelligence, open or closed to divine knowledge.

Even the natural sciences are subject to the general law. Genius rarely proceeds by relying on syllogisms. Its pace is free; its manner stems from inspiration: it is seen arriving, but no one has seen it walking. Is there, for

example, a man who can be compared to Kepler in astronomy? Is Newton himself anything other than the sublime commentator of this great man, who alone was able to write his name in the heavens? For the laws of the world are *Kepler's laws*; there is especially something so extraordinary in the third law, so independent of all other prior knowledge, that one cannot help but recognize a true inspiration in it. Now, he only arrived at this immortal discovery by following some mystical ideas of numbers and celestial harmony, which accorded very well with his profoundly religious character, but which, from a purely rational perspective, are nothing but pure dreams. If these ideas had been submitted to the examination of certain philosophers on guard against a kind of superstition, to that of Bacon, for example, who loved astronomy and physics as the *first men* of Italy loved women, he would not have failed to see in them *cave idols* or *tribal idols*, etc.

But this Bacon, *who had substituted the method of induction for that of the syllogism*, as has been said in a century in which all kinds of delirium have been exhausted, not only remained a stranger to the discovery of his immortal contemporary, but he clung obstinately to the system of Ptolemy; despite the works of Copernicus, and he called this obstinacy *a noble constancy*.

And in Roger Bacon's homeland, even after Galileo's discoveries, it was believed that caustic glasses should be concave, and that the groping motion of raising and lowering a lens to find the true focal point increased the heat of the sun's rays.

It is impossible that you have not sometimes been amused by the mechanical explanations of magnetism, and especially by Descartes's atoms formed into *corkscrews*; but you surely have not read what Gilbert said about them: for these old books are no longer read. I do not claim to say that he is right; but I would wager without hesitation my life, and even my happiness, that nothing will ever be discovered in this profound mystery of nature except by following the ideas of Gilbert, or others of the same kind, just as the general movement of waters in the world will never be explained satisfactorily (assuming it can be explained at all) except in the manner of Seneca, that is to say, by methods totally foreign to our material experiences and to the laws of mechanics.

The more the sciences relate to humankind, like medicine, for example, the less they can do without religion: read, if you wish, irreligious physicians, whether as scholars or writers, if they possess stylistic merit; but never summon them to your bedside. Let us leave aside, if you will, metaphysical reason, which is nonetheless quite important; but let us never forget Celsus's precept, which advises us somewhere to seek, as much as possible, *the physician who is a friend*; let us therefore seek above all the one who has sworn to love all humankind, and let us flee above all the one who, by his very nature, owes love to no one.

Mathematics itself is subject to this law, although it is an instrument rather than a science, since it only has value insofar as it leads us to knowledge of another kind: compare the mathematicians of the great century with those of the following one. Ours were *powerful cipherers*: they wielded the instruments placed in their hands with marvelous and admirable dexterity; but these instruments were invented in the age of faith and even of religious factions, which have an admirable capacity to create great figures and great talents. It is not the same thing to advance along a path as it is to discover it.

The most original of the 18th ¯ century mathematicians, as far as I am allowed to judge, the most prolific, and above all the one whose work turned most to the benefit of man (this point must never be forgotten) by the application he made of it to optics and nautical art, was Leonardo Euler, whose tender piety was known to everyone, especially to me, who was able to admire him closely for so long.

Let no one cry out against illuminism *or* mysticism. Words are nothing; and yet it is with this nothingness that genius is intimidated and the path of discovery is blocked. Some philosophers in this century have dared to speak of *causes*: but when will people understand that there can be no *causes* in the material order, and that they must all be sought in another realm?

Now, if this rule holds true even in the natural sciences, why should we not, in the sciences of a supernatural order, indulge ourselves, without the slightest scruple, in research that we could also call *supernatural*? I am astonished, Count, to find in you prejudices from which the independence of your mind could so easily have escaped.

THE COUNT

I assure you, my dear friend, there could well be some misunderstanding between us, as happens in most discussions. Never have I ever claimed to deny, God forbid, that religion is the mother of science: theory and experience unite to proclaim this truth. The scepter of science belongs to Europe only because it is Christian. It has reached this high point of civilization and knowledge only because it began with theology; because universities were initially nothing more than schools of theology, and because all the sciences, grafted onto this divine *subject*, have manifested the divine sap through an immense flourishing. The indispensable necessity of this long preparation of the European genius is a fundamental truth that has completely escaped modern discoursers. Even Bacon, whom you rightly criticized, was mistaken about it, as were those far inferior to him. He is quite amusing when he addresses this subject, and especially when he rails against scholasticism and theology. It must be admitted, this celebrated man seemed to completely misunderstand the essential preparations necessary to ensure that science is not a great evil. Teach young people physics and chemistry before imbuing them with religion and morality; send academics to a new nation before sending missionaries, and you will see the result.

We can even, I believe, prove to the point of demonstration that there is in science, if it is not entirely subordinate to national dogmas, something hidden which tends to degrade man, and above all to make him useless or a bad citizen: this principle well developed would provide a clear and peremptory solution to the great problem of the usefulness of the sciences, a problem which Rousseau greatly confused in the middle of the last century with his false spirit and his half-knowledges.

Why are scholars almost always bad statesmen, and generally inept at business?

On the contrary, why is it that priests (I say PRIESTS) *are* naturally statesmen? That is to say, why does the priestly order produce more of them, proportionally speaking, than all the other orders of society? Especially of those *natural* statesmen, if I may put it that way, who throw themselves into affairs and succeed without preparation, such as Charles V and his son employed many of, and who astonish us throughout history?

Why was the noblest, strongest, most powerful of monarchies made, quite literally, by BISHOPS (this is an admission by Gibbon), *just as a beehive is made by bees*?

I will not conclude on this important subject; but, my dear senator, for the sake of this religion itself and for the honor due to it, let us remember that it recommends nothing to us so much as simplicity and obedience. Whose clay is better known than God's? I dare say that what we must ignore is more important to us than what we must know. If He has placed certain objects beyond the limits of our vision, it is doubtless because it would be dangerous for us to perceive them distinctly. I wholeheartedly embrace and admire your comparison of the earth open or closed to the influences of heaven: take care, however, not to draw a false conclusion from an evident principle. Let religion, and even piety, be the best preparation for the human mind; That it disposes him, as far as individual capacity allows, to every kind of knowledge and sets him on the path of discovery is an undeniable truth for any man who has even touched the cup of true philosophy. But what conclusion shall we draw from this truth? *That we must therefore exert all our efforts to penetrate the mysteries of this religion?* Not at all: allow me to tell you, that is a blatant sophism. The legitimate conclusion is that we must subordinate all our knowledge to religion, firmly believe that we study while praying; and above all, when we engage with rational philosophy, never forget that any proposition of metaphysics that does not arise naturally from a Christian dogma is and can only be a culpable extravagance. That suffices for practical purposes: what does everything else matter? I followed with great interest everything you told us about this incomprehensible unity, the necessary basis of the *reversibility* that would explain everything, if it could be explained. I applaud your knowledge and the way you know how to bring it together; however, what advantage does it give you over me? I believe in this reversibility just as you do, just as I believe in the existence of the city of Beijing as well as that missionary who recently returned from there, with whom we dined the other day. If you were to grasp the reason for this dogma, you would lose the merit of the faith, not only without any benefit, but also with a very great danger to yourself; for in that case, you would not be able to answer for your own actions. Do you remember what we were reading together some time ago in a book by Saint-Martin? *That the imprudent chemist runs the risk of worshipping his own work.* This statement is not arbitrary: did not Malebranche say *that a false belief in the efficacy of secondary causes could lead to idolatry?* It's the same idea. We recently lost a mutual friend, eminent in both science and holiness. You know that when he conducted certain chemical experiments, always for himself alone, he felt compelled to take holy precautions. It's said that pneumatic chemistry dates from our time, but there has been, there is, and doubtless there always will be, a chemistry that was too *pneumatic*. The ignorant laugh at these kinds of things because they understand nothing

about them, and that's all the better for them. The more the intellect knows, the more guilty it can be. We often speak with astonishment of the absurdity of idolatry; but I can assure you that if we possessed the knowledge that led the first idolaters astray, we would all be idolaters, or at least God could scarcely find *twelve thousand men in each tribe*.

We always begin with the banal assumption that humankind gradually rose from barbarism to science and civilization. This is the favorite dream, the fundamental error, and, as the school says, the *protopseudes* of our century. But if the philosophers of this unfortunate century, with the horrific perversity we have witnessed in them, and who still persist despite the warnings they have received, had also possessed some of that knowledge which must necessarily have belonged to the first humans, woe to the universe! They would have brought upon humankind some calamity of a supernatural order. Look at what they have done and what they have brought upon us, despite their profound stupidity, in the spiritual sciences.

Therefore, I oppose, as much as I can, any curious inquiry that falls outside the temporal sphere of humankind. *Religion is the spice that prevents science from being corrupted* —this is an excellent saying of Bacon's, and, for once, I don't feel like criticizing him. I would only be slightly tempted to believe that he himself did not sufficiently reflect on his own maxim, since he worked formally to separate the *spice* from science.

Observe further that religion is the greatest vehicle of science. It cannot, of course, create talent that does not exist: but it exalts it immeasurably wherever it finds it, especially the talent for discovery, while irreligion always represses it and often stifles it. What more could we want? It is not permissible to penetrate the instrument that has been given to us for penetrating. It is too easy to break it, or, what is perhaps worse, to corrupt it. I thank God for my ignorance even more than for my knowledge; for my knowledge is me, at least in part, and consequently I cannot be sure that it is good: my ignorance, on the contrary, at least that which I speak of, is His; therefore, I have all possible confidence in it. I will not foolishly attempt to scale the salutary enclosure with which divine wisdom has surrounded us; I am sure that I am on this side, on the lands of truth: who assures me that beyond (not to make the sadder supposition) I will not find myself in the realms of superstition?

THE KNIGHT

Between two superior powers fighting each other, a third, although very weak, may well offer itself as mediator, provided that it is agreeable to them and that it has good faith.

It seems to me, Senator, that you have given a little too much leeway to your religious ideas. You say that the explanation of causes must always be sought outside the material world, and you cite Kepler, who arrived at his famous discoveries through some system of celestial harmony which I don't understand at all; but in all this I see not a trace of religion. One can be a musician and calculate chords without having any pity. It seems to me that Kepler could very well have discovered his laws without believing in God.

THE SENATOR

You answered yourself, Monsieur le Chevalier, by uttering those words *outside the material world*. I did not say that every discovery must spring immediately from a dogma like a chicken from an egg; I said that there are no causes in matter, and consequently, they should not be sought in matter. Now, my dear friend, only religious men can and will rise above it. Others believe only in matter and even become angry when one speaks to them of another order of things. Our century needs a mechanical astronomy, a mechanical chemistry, a mechanical gravity, a mechanical morality, a mechanical discourse, mechanical remedies to cure mechanical illnesses: what do I know? Is not everything mechanical? Now, only the religious spirit can cure this illness. We were speaking of Kepler; But Kepler would never have taken the path that led him so well had he not been so clearly religious. I would need no other proof of his character than the title he gave to his work on the true epoch of the birth of Jesus Christ. I doubt that any astronomer in London or Paris today would choose such a title.

Thus, you see, my dear knight, that I have not confused the objects, as you first believed.

THE KNIGHT

So be it: I am not strong enough to argue with you; but here is one point on which I would still like to quarrel with you: our friend had said that your penchant for explanations of an extraordinary kind could lead you, and perhaps others, into very great dangers, and that they also had the extreme disadvantage of hindering useful studies. To this you replied that it was precisely the opposite, and that nothing favors the advancement of science and discoveries of all kinds like this turn of mind which always carries us beyond the material world. This is yet another point on which I do not believe myself strong enough to discuss with you; but what seems evident to me is that you have passed over the other objection in silence, and yet it is serious. I grant that mystical and extraordinary ideas can sometimes lead to important discoveries: one must also weigh in the other side of the scale the disadvantages that may result from them. Let us grant, for example, that they may enlighten a Kepler: if they are to produce ten thousand madmen who trouble the world and even corrupt it, I feel very willing to sacrifice the great man.

I believe, therefore, if you will excuse my impertinence, that you have gone a little too far and that you would do well to be a little more wary of your *spiritual impulses*: at least, I cannot stress this enough, as far as I can tell. But since the duty of a mediator is to take something away and give something to both parties, I must also tell you, Count, that you seem to me to be taking timidity to extremes. I commend you on your religious devotion. I have traveled extensively: truly, I have found nothing better; but I do not quite understand how faith leads you to fear superstition. It seems to me that quite the opposite should be true; I am all the more surprised that you resent this superstition so much, which, it seems to me, is not such a bad thing. What, after all, is superstition? Abbé Gérard, in an excellent book whose title, however, directly contradicts the work itself, teaches me that there are no synonyms in languages. Superstition is therefore neither error, nor *fanaticism*, nor any other such monstrosity bearing a different name. I repeat, what then is superstition? Doesn't *"super* " mean " *beyond* "? It must therefore be something that is *beyond* legitimate belief. In truth, there's no cause for alarm. I have often observed in this world that *what is sufficient is not enough*; don't mistake this for a play on words: he who wants to do precisely everything that is permitted will soon do what is not. We are never certain of our moral qualities until we have been able to give them a little inspiration. In the political world, the constitutional powers established among free nations scarcely survive except by clashing with one another. If someone comes at you to knock you down, it's not enough to simply stand there and stand; you must strike him yourself and force him back if you can. To cross a ditch, you must always fix your gaze well beyond the edge, or you risk falling in. Finally, this is a general rule; it would be quite peculiar if religion were an exception. I don't believe that a man, and even less a nation, can believe precisely what he should. There will always be more or less. I imagine, my good friends, that honor doesn't displease you? However, what is honor? It is the *superstition of virtue*, or it is nothing. In love, in friendship, in fidelity, in good faith, etc., superstition is amiable, even precious, and often necessary; why should it not be the same with piety? I am inclined to believe that the outcry against *the excesses of the thing*They are enemies of *the thing*. The reason is undoubtedly sound, but not everything should be resolved by reason. – Listen to this little tale, I beg you; perhaps it is a story.

Two sisters have their father at war: they sleep in the same room; it is cold, and the weather is bad: they talk about the hardships and dangers surrounding their father. *Perhaps*, says one, *he is bivouacking right now: perhaps he is lying on the ground, without fire or blanket: who knows if this is not the moment the enemy has chosen... ah!...*

She leaps out of bed, runs in her shift to her desk, pulls out her father's portrait, places it under her bedside table, and throws her head down on the cherished jewel. " *Good Papa! I'll keep you safe*." " *But my poor sister*," says the other, " *I think you're going crazy. Do you really think that by catching a cold you'll save our father, and that he'll be much safer because your head is resting on his portrait? Be careful not to break it, and believe me, sleep*."

Certainly she is right, and everything she says is true; but if you had to marry one or the other of these two sisters, tell me, serious philosophers, would you choose the logician or the *superstitious one*?

To return to my point, I believe that superstition is *an advanced form* of religion that must not be destroyed, for it is not good that one should be able to approach the foot of the wall unhindered, measure its height, and set up the ladders. You will cite abuses against me; but first, do you believe that the abuses of a divine thing do not have certain natural limits within the thing itself, and that the drawbacks of these abuses could ever equal the danger of shaking faith? I will tell you further, following my analogy: if an advanced fortification is too advanced, it will

also be a great *abuse*; for it will only be useful to the enemy, who will use it to take cover and bombard the fortress: should we then refrain from building advanced fortifications? With this fine fear of *abuses*, we would end up no longer daring to move.

But there are ridiculous abuses and criminal abuses; that's what puzzles me. It's a point I haven't been able to unravel in my mind. I've seen men given over to those peculiar ideas you were just mentioning, who were, I assure you, the most honest and amiable people one could possibly know. I'd like to tell you a little story about this that I'm sure will amuse you. You know in what retreat and with whom I spent the winter of 1806. Among those present was one of your old friends, the Count, who was the delight of our company; he was the old Commander de M..., whom you saw often in Lyon in the past, and who has just finished his long and virtuous career. He was seventy years old when we saw him fly into a rage for the first time in his life. Among the books sent to us from the neighboring town to occupy our long evenings, we one day found the posthumous work of some escapee from the slums of Geneva who had spent a large part of his life searching for the mechanical cause of gravity, and who, flattering himself that he had found it, modestly sang "Eureka!", while nonetheless expressing astonishment at the *icy reception his system received*. On his deathbed, he had instructed his executors to publish, for the good of the world, this rare discovery accompanied by several pieces of pestilential metaphysics. You can well imagine that he was obeyed punctually; and this book, which had fallen to the good commander, enraged him in a most entertaining way.

“The *wise* author of this book,” he told us, “discovered that the cause of gravity must lie outside the world, since there is no machine in the universe capable of producing what we observe. You might ask me what a region *outside the world* is? The author doesn’t say, but it must be very far away. In any case, *in this land outside the world, there once was* (we don’t know how or why, for neither he nor his friends conceive of any beginning), *there was*, I say, *a sufficient quantity of atoms in reserve. These atoms were made like cages whose bars are several million times longer than they are thick. He calls these atoms* ultra-mundane, *because of their native land, or gravitational, because of their functions*.”

" *Now, it happened that one day God took as many of these atoms as he could hold in his two hands, and threw them with all his might into our sphere, and that is why the world revolves.*

" *But it must be noted that this projection of atoms took place once and for all, because from then on there is no example of God interfering with gravity.*

"This is where we are! This is what we've been told; for anything is said to those who can hear anything. Today, in our reading, we resemble those unclean insects that can only live in filth; we disdain everything that instructed, everything that charmed our ancestors; and, for us, a book is always good enough, provided it is bad."

Up to that point, everyone could agree with the excellent old man; but we were completely taken aback when he added:

“Have you never noticed that, among the countless things that have been said, especially in the age of balloons, about the flight of birds and the efforts our ponderous species has made at various times to imitate this marvelous mechanism, it has never occurred to any philosopher to wonder whether birds might not give rise to some particular reflections on gravity? Yet, if people had remembered that all of antiquity agreed to recognize something divine in birds; that it always consulted them about the future; that, according to a strange tradition, it declared them *to predate the gods*; that it consecrated certain birds to its principal deities; that the Egyptian priests, according to Clement of Alexandria, ate nothing but the flesh of birds during their legal purifications, *because birds were the lightest of all animals*, and that, according to Plato in his book of Laws, the *most pleasant offering that can be made to the gods is a bird*, if they had also considered this multitude of supernatural events in which birds have intervened, and especially the outstanding honor paid to the dove, I do not doubt that they would have been led to question whether the common law of gravity affects living birds to the same degree as the rest of raw or organized matter.

“But to raise ourselves even higher, if the proud blind man I mentioned earlier, instead of reading Lucretius, which he received at thirteen from the hands of a murderous father, had read the lives of the saints, he might have conceived some sound ideas about the path one should take to discover the cause of gravity; he would have seen that among the undeniable miracles performed by these chosen ones, or which were performed upon them, and whose certainty even the boldest skepticism cannot shake, there is none more undeniable or more frequent than

that of physical rapture. Read, for example, the lives and canonization proceedings of Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Philip Neri, Saint Teresa, and so on, and you will see if it is possible to doubt. Would you dispute the facts recounted by this saint herself, whose genius and candor equaled her holiness!" One can almost hear Saint Paul recounting the gifts of the early Church, and prescribing rules for manifesting them usefully, with a naturalness, a calm, a composure a thousand times more persuasive than the most solemn oaths.

"Young people, especially studious young people, and especially those who have had the good fortune to escape certain dangers, are very prone to dream during sleep that they rise into the air and move about at will; a man of great wit and excellent character, whom I saw often in the past, but whom I shall not see again, told me one day that he had been so often visited in his youth by these kinds of dreams that he had begun to suspect that gravity was not natural to man. For my part, I can assure you that the illusion in me was sometimes so strong that I was awake for a few seconds before being thoroughly disabused of it.

"But there is something greater than all this. When the divine author of our religion had accomplished all that he still had to do on earth after his death, when he had given his disciples the three gifts that he will never take away from them, intelligence, mission, and indefectibility; then, *everything being consummated* in a new sense, in the presence of his disciples who had just touched him and eaten with him, the God-Man *ceased to weigh* and was lost in the clouds.

"There is a long way to go from *gravitational atoms*; however, there is no other way to know or at least suspect what gravity is."

At these words, a burst of laughter, coming from a corner of the drawing room, disconcerted us all. You might think the commander was angry: not at all, he remained silent; but we saw on his face a profound expression of sadness mingled with terror. I cannot tell you how interesting I found him. The laugher, whose name you doubtless think you can guess, felt obliged to offer his apologies, which were given and received very graciously. The evening ended very peacefully.

At night, when my four curtains had separated me, by a *double barrier,* from men, from light, and from business, all this discourse came back to me. *What harm is there*, I said to myself, *in this worthy man believing that the state of holiness and the impulses of ardent piety have the power to suspend, with regard to man, the laws of gravity, and that one can draw legitimate conclusions about the nature of this law from it? Surely there is nothing more innocent.*

But then I remembered certain people I know who seem to have arrived by the same path at a very different result. It is for them that the word " *enlightened* " was coined, a word always used pejoratively. There is indeed some truth in this movement of universal conscience that condemns these men and their doctrines: and, in fact, I have known several of a very dubious character, of rather questionable probity; and remarkable above all for a more or less visible hatred of the priestly order and hierarchy. What, then, are we to think? I fell asleep with this doubt, and I find it again today in your presence. I waver between the two systems you have presented to me. One seems to deprive humanity of the greatest advantages, but at least one can sleep soundly; the other warms the heart and disposes the mind to the noblest and most fruitful endeavors; but there is also cause for trembling for common sense and for something even better. Couldn't we find a rule that would reassure me and allow me to have an opinion?

THE COUNT

My dearest knight, you are like a man submerged in water who asks for a drink. This rule you are asking about exists: it surrounds you, it is universal. I will prove to you in a few words that, without it, it is impossible for man to walk firmly, equidistant from enlightenment and skepticism; and for this reason...

THE SENATOR

We will hear from you another day.

THE COUNT

Ah! Ah! You are one of the elite. Well then! Let's not speak of it again for today; but I owe you thanks and congratulations, Sir, for your charming defense of superstition. As you spoke, I saw those hideous features and long ears with which paintings never fail to adorn her disappear; and when you finished, she seemed to me almost a pretty woman. When you reach our age, alas! we will no longer hear you; but others will hear you, and you will pass on to them the knowledge you received from us. For it was indeed we, if you please, who first turned the spade over this good soil. Moreover, gentlemen, we are not gathered here to quarrel, but to discuss. This table, though it holds only tea and a few books, is also a *matchmaker of friendship*, as the proverb our friend quoted just now says: thus we will no longer argue. I would simply like to propose an idea which, it seems to me, could well be considered a peace treaty between us. It has always seemed to me that, in higher metaphysics, there are rules of *false position* just as there were once in arithmetic. This is how I view all opinions that depart from explicit revelation and that are used to explain, in a more or less plausible way, this or that point of that same revelation. Let us take, if you will, as an example, the opinion of the pre-existence of souls, which has been used to explain original sin. You can see at a glance all that can be said against the successive creation of souls, and the advantage that can be drawn from pre-existence for a host of interesting explanations. I expressly declare to you, however, that I do not claim to adopt this system as truth; but I say, and here is my rule of *false position.* If I, a mere mortal, have been able to find a solution that is by no means absurd and that adequately explains a perplexing problem, how can I doubt that, if this system is not true, there is another solution that I am unaware of, and that God has seen fit to withhold from our curiosity? I say the same of the ingenious hypothesis of the illustrious Leibniz, which he formulated concerning the crime of Sextus Tarquin, and which he developed with such sagacity in his Theodicy; I say the same of a hundred other systems, and of yours in particular, my worthy friend. Provided that they are not regarded as demonstrations, that they are proposed modestly, and that they are proposed only to put one's mind at ease, as I have just told you, and that they lead neither to pride nor to contempt for authority, it seems to me that criticism should remain silent in the face of these precautions. We grope our way through all the sciences: why should metaphysics, the most obscure of all, be an exception? I always come back to the point, however, that if one indulges too much in these kinds of transcendent pursuits, one demonstrates at least a certain restlessness that greatly highlights the merit of faith and docility. Don't you think we've been in the clouds for quite some time now? Have we become better for it? I somewhat doubt it. It's time to come back down to earth. I confess I'm very fond of practical ideas, and especially those striking analogies found between the dogmas of Christianity and those universal doctrines that humankind has always professed, without it being possible to assign them any human origin. After the whirlwind journey we've just undertaken into the highest realms of metaphysics, I'd like to propose something less sublime: let's talk, for example, about *indulgences*.

THE SENATOR

The transition is a bit abrupt.

THE COUNT

What do you mean *by abrupt*, my dear friend? It is neither abrupt nor insensitive, for there is neither. We have never strayed for a moment, and even now we are not changing our subject. Have we not examined in general the great question of the sufferings of the righteous in this world, and have we not clearly recognized that all objections based on this supposed injustice are manifest sophisms? This first consideration led us to that of *reversibility*, which is the great mystery of the universe. I did not refuse, Senator, to pause for a moment with you on the edge of this abyss into which you cast such a penetrating gaze. If you did not *see*, at least you cannot be accused of not having looked closely. But in attempting to address this great subject, we were careful not to believe that this mystery, which explains everything, itself needed to be explained. It is a fact, a belief as natural to man as sight or breathing; and this belief sheds the greatest light on the ways of Providence in the governance of the moral world. Now, I will show you this universal dogma in the doctrine of the Church on a point that aroused so much commotion in the 16th $^{\text{century}}$, and which was the first pretext for one of the greatest crimes that men have committed against God. There is, however, no Protestant father of a family who has not granted indulgences in his own home, who has not pardoned a punishable child *through the intercession* and *merits* of another child with whom he has reason to be pleased. There is no Protestant sovereign who has not signed fifty *indulgences* during his reign, granting employment, remitting or commuting a sentence, etc., *through the merits*Fathers, brothers, sons,

relatives, or ancestors. This principle is so general and so natural that it manifests itself at every moment in the smallest acts of human justice. You have laughed a thousand times at the foolish scales that Homer placed in the hands of his Jupiter, apparently to ridicule him. Christianity shows us a very different scale. On one side, all crimes; on the other, all satisfactions; on this side, the good works of all humankind, the blood of martyrs, the sacrifices and tears of innocence accumulating ceaselessly to balance the evil that, since the beginning of time, has poured its poisoned streams into the other basin. In the end, the side of salvation must prevail, and to hasten this universal work, the anticipation of which causes all beings to groan, it is enough for humankind to will it. Not only does he enjoy his own merits, but external satisfactions are imputed to him by eternal justice, provided he has willed it and made himself worthy of this *reversibility*. Our separated brethren have contested this principle, as if the redemption they worship with us were anything other than *a great indulgence, granted to humankind through the infinite merits of innocence par excellence, voluntarily sacrificed for it!* Make a very important observation on this point: the man who is a child of truth is so well made for truth that he can only be deceived by truth corrupted or misinterpreted. They said: *The God-Man has paid for us; therefore we have no need of other merits*; they should have said: *Therefore, the merits of the innocent can serve the guilty*. Since redemption is but a *great indulgence*, indulgence, in turn, is but a *diminished redemption*. The disproportion is undoubtedly immense; but the principle is the same, and the analogy undeniable. Is not *general indulgence futile for one who does not wish to benefit from it and who, for his part, nullifies it by the misuse he makes of his freedom? The same is true of particular redemption*. And one might think that error had taken precautions against this evident analogy by contesting the merit of personal good works; but the appalling greatness of man is such that he has the power to resist God and reject His grace: it is such that the sovereign ruler, and *the king of virtues*, treats him only WITH RESPECT. It is a matter for him, only with him; He does not force his will (this expression is meaningless); it must acquiesce. It is necessary that, through humble and courageous cooperation, man appropriate this satisfaction, otherwise it will remain foreign to him.*He must undoubtedly pray as if he could do nothing: but he must also act as if he could do everything*. Nothing is granted except through his efforts, whether he deserves it himself or appropriates the works of another.

You see how each dogma of Christianity is linked to the fundamental laws of the spiritual world: it is just as important to observe that there is not one that does not tend to purify man and exalt him.

What a magnificent tableau this immense city of spirits is, with its three realms constantly interconnected! The world that *struggles* extends a hand to the world that *suffers* and grasps with the other that of the world that *triumphs*. Thanksgiving, prayer, satisfaction, aid, inspiration, faith, hope, and love flow from one to the other like benevolent rivers. Nothing is isolated, and the spirits, like the blades of a magnetic beam, draw upon their own strength and that of all the others.

And what a beautiful law it is that establishes two indispensable conditions for any *indulgence* or *secondary redemption*: abundant merit on the one hand, and prescribed good works and purity of conscience on the other! Without meritorious work, without a *state of grace*, there can be no remission through the merits of innocence. What a noble emulation for virtue! What a warning and what an encouragement for the guilty!

“You think,” the Apostle of India once said to his neophytes, “you think of your brothers who suffer in another world: you have the religious ambition to relieve them; but think first of yourselves: God does not listen to those who come to him with a stained conscience; before undertaking to remove souls from the pains of purgatory, begin by delivering *your own from hell*.”

There is no nobler and more useful belief, and every legislator should try to establish it in his own country, without even inquiring whether it is well-founded; but I do not believe it is possible to show a single universally useful opinion that is not true.

The blind or the rebels can therefore contest the principle of *indulgences* as much as they like: we will let them say, it is that of *reversibility*? it is the faith of the universe.

I hope, gentlemen, that in these last two conversations we have added much to the body of ideas we gathered in the first on the great question before us. Pure reason has provided us with solutions capable alone of making Providence triumph, *if one dares to judge it*. But Christianity has come to present us with a new one, all the more powerful because it rests on a universal idea as old as the world, and which needed only to be rectified and sanctioned by revelation. So when the guilty party asks us *why innocence suffers in this world*, we will not lack

answers, as you have seen; but we can choose one more direct and perhaps more moving than all the others. – We can answer: *It suffers for you, if you wish*.

END OF THE TENTH INTERVIEW

ELEVENTH INTERVIEW

THE KNIGHT

Although you don't much care for journeys into the clouds, my dear Count, I would nevertheless like to transport you there again. You interrupted me the other day by comparing me *to a man plunged into water who asks for a drink*. It's very well said, I assure you; but your epigram leaves all my doubts unresolved. Man today seems unable to breathe within the ancient confines of human faculties. He wants to overstep them; he thrashes about like an indignant eagle against the bars of its cage. Look at what he is attempting in the natural sciences! Look also at this new alliance he has forged and is advancing with such success between physical theories and the arts; how he is forcing prodigies to be born in the service of science! How could you expect this general spirit of the age not to extend to questions of the spiritual order? And why should he not be allowed to exercise himself on the most important object for man, provided that he knows how to stay within the bounds of wise and respectful moderation?

THE COUNT

Firstly, Sir, I would not believe I was being too demanding if I asked that the human mind, free on all other subjects except one, should refrain from any rash inquiry on this one. Secondly, this moderation you speak of, which is such a fine thing in speculation, is truly impossible in practice: at least it is so rare that it must be considered impossible. Now, you will admit that when a certain inquiry is unnecessary, and is capable of producing infinite evils, it is our duty to abstain from it. This is what has always made me suspect, even odious, I confess, all the spiritual impulses of the Illuminati, and I would much prefer...

THE SENATOR

So you are decidedly afraid of the *Illuminati*, my dear friend! But I don't believe I am being too demanding if I humbly ask that the words be defined, and that someone finally have the kindness to tell us what an *Illuminati* is, so that we know who and what we are talking about, which is certainly useful in a discussion. The name Illuminati is given *to* those guilty men who, in our time, dared to conceive and even organize in Germany, through the most criminal association, the dreadful project of extinguishing Christianity and sovereignty in Europe. The same name is given to the virtuous disciple of Claude de Saint-Martin, who not only professes Christianity, but strives only to rise to the most sublime heights of this divine law. You will admit, gentlemen, that humanity has never fallen into a greater confusion of ideas. I confess that I cannot calmly listen to the world's fools of both sexes crying " *illuminism* " at the slightest word that escapes their understanding, with a flippancy and ignorance that would exhaust even the most seasoned patience. But you, my dear *Roman* friend, you, such a great defender of authority, speak frankly to me. Can you read Holy Scripture without being compelled to recognize a multitude of passages that overwhelm your intellect and invite it to engage in the pursuit of wise *exegesis*? Was it not to you, as to others, that it was said: " *Search the Scriptures* "? Tell me, I pray you, in all conscience, do you understand the first chapter of Genesis? Do you understand the Book of Revelation and the Song of Songs? Does Ecclesiastes cause you no trouble? When you read in Genesis that when our first parents realized their nakedness, *God made them garments of skin*, do you take this literally? Do you believe that the Almighty would have gone to the trouble of killing animals, skinning them, tanning their hides, and finally creating thread and needles to finish these new tunics? Do you believe that the guilty rebels of Babel would have actually undertaken, to put their minds at ease, to build a tower whose weathervane would only reach the Moon (I say little, as you can see!), *and when the stars fall to Earth*, will you not be prevented from placing them? But since we are speaking of heaven and stars, what do

you say to the way this word "heaven" is often used by sacred writers? When you read that *God created heaven and earth*; *that* heaven *belongs to Him*, but that He gave*the earth to the children of men*; *that the Savior ascended into heaven and descended into hell*, etc., how do you understand these expressions? And when you read that *the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father*, and that *Saint Stephen, on his deathbed, saw him in this position*, does your mind not experience a certain unease, and a certain wish that other words had come to the sacred writer? A thousand expressions of this kind will prove to you that it has pleased God, sometimes to let man speak as he wished, according to the prevailing ideas of this or that era, and sometimes to conceal, under seemingly simple and sometimes crude forms, lofty mysteries that are not meant for all eyes: now, in both cases, what harm is there in exploring these depths of divine grace and goodness, as one digs the earth to extract gold or diamonds? More than ever, gentlemen, we must attend to these lofty speculations, for we must be ready for an immense event in the divine order, toward which we are marching with an accelerated speed that will strike all observers. There is no longer any religion on earth: humankind cannot remain in this state. Moreover, formidable oracles announce that *the times have arrived*. Several theologians, even Catholic ones, have believed that events of the first order and not far removed from the present were foretold in the revelation of Saint John; and although Protestant theologians have generally spouted only gloomy dreams about this same book, in which they have never been able to see anything but what they wished to see, nevertheless, after having paid this unfortunate tribute to sectarian fanaticism, I see that certain writers of this party are already adopting the principle: *that several prophecies contained in the Apocalypse refer to our modern times*. One of these writers even went so far as to say that the event had already begun, and that the French nation was destined to be the great instrument of the greatest of revolutions. There is perhaps not a truly religious man in Europe (I speak of the educated class) who does not expect something extraordinary at this moment: now, tell me, gentlemen, do you believe that this consensus of all men can be disregarded? Is this general cry announcing great things nothing? Go back to past centuries, transport yourselves to the birth of the Savior: at that time, did not a loud and mysterious voice, coming from the eastern regions, cry out: " *The East is about to triumph; the victor will set out from Judea; a divine child is given to us, the golden age on earth..."* You know the rest. These ideas were universally widespread; and as they lent themselves infinitely to poetry, the greatest Latin poet seized upon them and clothed them in the most brilliant colors in his Pollio, which was later translated into rather beautiful Greek verse and read in that language at the Council of Nicaea by order of the Emperor Constantine. Truly, it was well-worthy of Providence to decree that this cry of humankind should resound forever in the immortal verses of Virgil. But the incurable incredulity of our age, instead of seeing in this piece what it truly contains—namely, an ineffable monument to the prophetic spirit that was then stirring in the universe—amuses itself by learnedly proving to us that Virgil was not a prophet, that is to say, that a flute doesn't know music, and that there is nothing extraordinary in the eleventh eclogue of this poet; and you will not find a new edition or translation of Virgil that does not contain some noble effort of reasoning and erudition to obscure the clearest thing in the world. The materialism that taints the philosophy of our age prevents it from seeing that the doctrine of spirits, and in particular that of the prophetic spirit, is entirely plausible in itself, and moreover, the best supported by the most universal and imposing tradition that ever existed. Do you think that the ancients all agreed that the power of divination or prophecy was an innate attribute of humankind? That is impossible. No being, and even less so an entire class of beings, could ever generally and invariably manifest an inclination contrary to its nature. Now, since humanity's eternal affliction is to foresee the future, this is certain proof that we have a claim on that future and that we have the means to attain it, at least under certain circumstances.

Ancient oracles relied on that inner movement within man which alerted him to his nature and his rights. The ponderous erudition of Van Dale and the pretty phrases of Fontenelle were employed in vain in the last century to establish the general nullity of these oracles. But, be that as it may, man would never have resorted to oracles, he could never have conceived of them, if he had not started from a primal idea by virtue of which he regarded them as possible, and even as existing. Man is subject to time, and yet he is by nature a stranger to time, so much so that the very idea of eternal happiness, combined with that of time, wearies and frightens him. Let everyone consult himself; he will feel crushed by the idea of a successive and endless happiness: I would say that *he is afraid of becoming bored*, if this expression were not out of place on such a serious subject. But this leads me to an observation that you may find of some value.

The prophet, enjoying the privilege of stepping outside of time, his ideas no longer bound by duration, touch upon one another by virtue of simple analogy and become confused, which necessarily spreads great confusion in his pronouncements. The Savior himself submitted to this state when, willingly surrendering to the prophetic spirit,

analogous ideas of great disasters, detached from time, led him to intertwine the destruction of Jerusalem with that of the world. Similarly, David, led by his own suffering to meditate on *the persecuted righteous*, suddenly steps outside of time and cries out, present in the future: " *They have torn my garments; they have cast lots on my clothing*." (Psalm 21:17-19) Another no less remarkable example of this prophetic journey is found in the magnificent Psalm 71; David, taking up his pen, was thinking only of Solomon; But soon, the idea of the type merging in his mind with that of the model, and scarcely had he reached the fifth verse when he exclaimed: " *It will last as long as the stars*!" And his enthusiasm growing from moment to moment, he produced a superb piece, unique in its warmth, its rapidity, its poetic movement. One could add other reflections drawn from judicial astrology, oracles, and divinations of all kinds, the abuse of which has undoubtedly dishonored the human mind, but which nevertheless had a true root, like all general beliefs. The prophetic spirit is natural to humankind and will never cease to stir in the world. By trying, in every age and in every place, to penetrate the future, *humankind declares that it is not made for time*; for *time is* something forced that only asks to end. Hence it is that, in our dreams, we never have any concept of time, and that the state of sleep has always been considered favorable to divine communications. Until this great enigma is explained to us, let us celebrate in time the one who said to nature:

Time will be yours; eternity will be mine; let us celebrate its mysterious grandeur, *now and forever, throughout all ages, throughout all eternities and beyond eternity, and when at last, all being consummated, an angel cries out in the midst of vanishing space*: THERE IS NO MORE TIME!

If you then ask me what this *prophetic spirit* I mentioned earlier is, I will answer that *there have never been any great events in the world that were not predicted in some way*. Machiavelli is the first man I know who put forward this proposition; but if you reflect on it yourselves, you will find that the assertion of this pious writer is justified by all of history. You have a final example of this in the French Revolution, predicted from all sides and in the most undeniable way. But to return to the point from which I started, do you believe that Virgil's century lacked brilliant minds who mocked *the great year, the golden age, the chaste Lucina, the august mother, and the mysterious child*? Yet all of this was true:

> The child from the heavens was ready to descend

And you can see in several writings, namely in the notes Pope appended to his verse translation of *Poillon*, that this play could be considered a version of Isaiah. Why would you expect it not to be so today? The world is waiting. How could we scorn this great persuasion? And by what right could we condemn those who, warned by these divine signs, devote themselves to holy inquiries?

Do you want further proof of what is brewing? Look for it in the sciences: consider the progress of chemistry, even of astronomy, and you will see where they are leading us. Would you believe, for example, if you weren't aware of it, that Newton is leading us back to Pythagoras, and that it will soon be demonstrated that bodies are moved precisely like the human body, by intelligences united with them, without anyone knowing how? Yet this is precisely what is about to be verified, and soon there will be no room for dispute. This doctrine may seem paradoxical, no doubt, and even ridiculous, because the prevailing opinion is so compelling; but wait until the natural affinity of religion and science unites them in the mind of a single man of genius: the appearance of this man cannot be far off; and perhaps he even already exists. He will be famous and will bring an end to the 18th century, which still endures. For intellectual centuries are not governed by the calendar like *centuries* properly speaking. Thus, opinions that seem to us today either bizarre or senseless will become axioms beyond doubt; and our present *stupidity* will be spoken of as we speak of the superstitions of the Middle Ages. Already, the force of circumstances has compelled some scholars of the material school to make concessions that bring them closer to the *spirit*; and others, unable to help but sense this underlying tendency of a powerful opinion, take precautions against it that perhaps make more of an impression on true observers than direct resistance. Hence their scrupulous attention to using only material expressions. Their writings deal exclusively with *mechanical* laws, *mechanical principles, physical* astronomy, and so on. It is not that they fail to perfectly sense that material theories utterly fail to satisfy the intellect: for if anything is evident to the untroubled human mind, it is that the movements of the universe cannot be explained by mechanical laws; but it is precisely because they sense this that they, so to speak, put words to warnings against truths. They are reluctant to admit it, but they are now held back only by

commitment and human respect. European scientists are at this moment a kind of conspirator or initiate, or whatever you prefer to call them, who have made science a sort of monopoly, and who absolutely do not want anyone to know *more* or *differently* than they do. But this science will soon be reviled by an *enlightened posterity,* who will rightly accuse today's followers of failing to draw from the truths God delivered to them the most precious consequences for humankind. Then, all of science will be transformed: the spirit, long dethroned and forgotten, will reclaim its rightful place. It will be demonstrated that all ancient traditions are true; that all of paganism is but a system of corrupted and misplaced truths; that it suffices, so to speak, to *cleanse* them and restore them to their proper place for them to shine with all their brilliance. In short, all ideas will change: and since on all sides a multitude of chosen ones cry out in unison: COME, LORD, COME! why would you blame those who rush headlong into this majestic future and glory in foretelling it? Like poets who, even in our times of weakness and decrepitude, still display some pale glimmers of the prophetic spirit which manifests itself in them by the ability to guess languages and to speak them purely before they are formed, so too do spiritual men sometimes experience moments of enthusiasm and inspiration which transport them into the future, and allow them to foresee the events that time ripens in the distance.

Remember, Count, the compliment you paid me regarding my erudition on the number *three*. This number, indeed, appears everywhere, in the physical world as well as in the moral realm, and in divine matters. God spoke to humankind for the first time on Mount Sinai, and this revelation was confined, for reasons unknown to us, to the narrow limits of a single people and a single country. After fifteen centuries, a second revelation was addressed to all humankind without distinction, and this is the one we enjoy; but the universality of its action was still infinitely restricted by the circumstances of time and place. Fifteen more centuries were to pass before America saw the light; and its vast lands still harbor a multitude of savage hordes so foreign to this great blessing that one would be inclined to believe they are excluded from it by nature by virtue of some primitive and inexplicable anathema. The Grand Lama alone has more spiritual subjects than the Pope; Bengal has sixty million inhabitants, China two hundred million, Japan twenty-five or thirty million. Consider also those immense archipelagos of the great Ocean, which today form a fifth of the world. Your missionaries have undoubtedly made marvelous efforts to proclaim the Gospel in some of these distant lands; but you see with what success. How many myriads of people will the *Good News* never reach! Did not the scimitar of Ishmael's son drive Christianity almost entirely out of Africa and Asia? And, finally, in our Europe, what a spectacle is presented to the religious eye! Christianity is radically destroyed in all the countries subjected to the senseless reform of the 16th century. century; and, even in your Catholic countries, it seems to exist in name only. I do not presume to place my Church above yours; we are not here to argue. Alas! I am well aware of what we lack; but I beg you, my good friends, to examine yourselves with the same sincerity: what hatred on the one hand, and on the other, what prodigious indifference among you for religion and for everything related to it! What a fury unleashed by all the Catholic powers against the head of your religion! To what extremity has the general invasion of your princes not reduced the priestly order among you! The public spirit that inspires or imitates them has turned entirely against this order. It is a conspiracy, a kind of rage; and for my part, I have no doubt that the Pope would prefer to deal with an ecclesiastical matter with England than with this or that Catholic cabinet that I could name for you. What will be the result of the thunder that is beginning to rumble again at this moment? Millions of Catholics may well fall under the scepters of heterodox leaders, for you and even for us. If that were so, I sincerely hope you are too enlightened to count on what is called *tolerance*; for you know full well that Catholicism is never *tolerated* in the truest sense of the word. When you are allowed to attend Mass and your priests are not shot, that is called *tolerance*; however, that is not quite what you are entitled to. Examine yourselves, moreover, in the silence of prejudice, and you will feel that your power is slipping away; you no longer possess that *awareness of strength* that often reappears in Homer's writings, when he wishes to make us feel the heights of courage. You no longer have heroes. You no longer dare anything, and others dare everything against you. Behold this gloomy picture; Add to this the expectation of the chosen men, and you will see if the enlightened ones are wrong to consider *a third explosion of all-powerful goodness toward humankind* as more or less imminent. I would never finish if I wanted to gather all the evidence that converges to justify this great expectation. Again, do not blame those who are concerned with this and who see, in revelation itself, reasons to foresee a revelation of revelation. Call these *enlightened* men, if you will; I will entirely agree with you, provided you pronounce the name earnestly.

You, my dear Count, you, such a stern apostle of unity and authority, have surely not forgotten all that you told us at the beginning of these conversations, about all that is extraordinary at this moment. Everything points to, and your own observations demonstrate it, *some great unity toward which we are marching with great strides*. You

cannot, therefore, without contradicting yourself, condemn those who *greet this unity from afar*, as you said, and who try, according to their abilities, to penetrate mysteries so formidable no doubt, but at the same time so comforting to you.

And do not say that everything has been said, that everything has been revealed, and that we are not permitted to expect anything new. Undoubtedly, we lack nothing for salvation; but as for divine knowledge, we lack much; and as for future manifestations, I have, as you see, a thousand reasons to expect them, while you have not one to prove me wrong. Was not the Hebrew who fulfilled the law secure in his conscience? I could cite to you, if necessary, countless passages from the Bible that promise the Jewish sacrifice and the throne of David a duration equal to that of the sun. The Jew who clung to the surface had every reason, *until the event*, to believe in the temporal reign of the Messiah; he was nevertheless mistaken, as has been seen since, but do we know what awaits us ourselves? *God will be with us until the end of time; the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church,* etc. Very well! Does it follow, I ask you, that God has forbidden himself any new manifestation, and that we are no longer permitted to learn anything beyond what we already know? That would be, admittedly, a strange line of reasoning.

Before concluding, I wish to draw your attention to two remarkable circumstances of our time. I want to speak first of the current state of Protestantism, which, on all sides, declares itself Socinian: this is what one might call its *ultimatum*, *so often predicted to their forefathers*. This is European Islam, the inevitable consequence of the Reformation. The word " *Islam"* may well surprise you at first glance; however, nothing could be simpler. Abbadie, one of the first doctors of the Protestant Church, devoted, as you know, an entire volume of his admirable work, * *On the Truth of the Christian Religion* *, to proving the divinity of the Savior. Now, in this volume, he asserts, with great knowledge of the facts, that if Jesus Christ is not God, Muhammad must undoubtedly be considered the apostle and benefactor of humankind, since he is said to have rescued it from the most culpable idolatry. Sir Jones remarked somewhere that *Islam is a Christian sect*, which is undeniable and not widely known. The same idea had been grasped by Leibniz, and, before him, by Minister Jurieu. Since Islam admits the unity of God and the divine mission of Jesus Christ, in whom, however, it sees only an excellent creature, why should it not belong to Christianity as much as Arianism, which professes the same doctrine? There is more; one could, I believe, derive from the Quran a profession of faith that would greatly trouble the delicate conscience of Protestant ministers if they were to sign it. Since Protestantism, therefore, almost universally established Socinianism wherever it reigned, it is supposed to have annihilated Christianity to the same extent.

Does it seem to you that such a state of affairs can last, and that this widespread apostasy is not both the cause and the harbinger of a memorable judgment?

The other point I wish to draw your attention to, and which is far more important than it appears at first glance, is the Bible Society. On this matter, Count, I could say to you in Cicero's style: " *Novi tuos sonitus*." You are very critical of this Bible Society, and I will frankly admit that you have quite good reasons against this inconceivable institution; if you wish, I will even add that, despite my Russian heritage, I defer greatly to your Church on this issue: for, since, as everyone acknowledges, you are such powerful agents of proselytism that you have even managed to intimidate politicians in more than one place, I see no reason why you should not be trusted in the propagation of Christianity, which you understand so well. Therefore, I do not argue about all this, provided that you allow me to revere, as much as I should, certain members and especially certain protectors of society, whose noble and holy intentions cannot even be suspected.

However, I believe I have discovered an aspect of this institution that has not been observed, and I leave it to you to judge. Please listen to me.

When a king of Egypt (we do not know which one nor at what time) had the Bible translated into Greek, he believed he was satisfying either his curiosity, or his benevolence, or his politics; and, without question, the true Israelites did not see without extreme displeasure this venerable law thrown as it were to the nations, and ceasing to speak exclusively the sacred idiom which had transmitted it in all its integrity from Moses to Eleazar.

But Christianity was advancing, and the translators of the Bible were working for it, rendering the Holy Scriptures into a universal language; so that the apostles and their first successors found the work completed. The Septuagint version suddenly ascended to every pulpit and was translated into all the languages then in use, which adopted it as their text.

Something similar is happening right now, albeit in a different form. I know that Rome cannot abide the Bible Society, which it regards as one of the most powerful machines ever deployed against Christianity. However, it should not be too alarmed: even if the Bible Society were unaware of what it was doing, it would nonetheless be for the future precisely what the Septuagint once was, which certainly had very little inkling of Christianity and the success its translation would have. A new outpouring of the Holy Spirit now being among the most reasonably expected things, the preachers of this new gift must be able to quote Holy Scripture to all peoples. The apostles are not translators; they have many other occupations; but the Bible Society, a blind instrument of providence, is preparing these different versions which the true messengers will one day explain by virtue of a legitimate mission (new or original, it matters not) *that will dispel doubt from the City of God*. And that is how the terrible enemies of unity are working to establish it.

THE COUNT

I am delighted, my excellent friend, that your brilliant explanations lead me to explain myself in turn in a way that will convince you that I do not have the great misfortune of speaking about what I do not know.

So you would like *us to be so kind as to begin* by explaining to you *what an "illuminé" is*. I don't deny that this term is often misused and made to mean whatever one wants; but while, on the one hand, we must despise certain frivolous decisions that are all too common in the world, we must also not, on the other hand, disregard the vague but general disapproval attached to certain names. If the term " *illuminé"* were not inherently reprehensible, it is difficult to understand how public opinion, constantly misled, could hear it uttered without associating it with the idea of ridiculous exaltation or something worse. But since you formally ask me to tell you what an " *illuminé"* is, perhaps few people are better qualified than I to satisfy your request.

First, I'm not saying that every *enlightened person* is a Freemason; I'm only saying that all those I've known, especially in France, were. Their fundamental dogma is that Christianity, as we know it today, is nothing more than a veritable blue lodge for the common people; but that it depends on the *individual's desire* to rise from degree to degree to sublime knowledge, such as that possessed by the first Christians who were true initiates. This is what some Germans have called *transcendental Christianity*. This doctrine is a mixture of Platonism, Origenism, and Hermetic philosophy, on a Christian basis.

Supernatural knowledge is the great goal of their work and their hopes; they do not doubt that it is possible for man to communicate with the spiritual world, to have commerce with spirits and thus discover the rarest mysteries.

Their invariable custom is to give extraordinary names to things most familiar by established names: thus, for them, a *man is a minor*, and his birth, *emancipation*. Original sin is called the *primal crime*; the acts of divine power or its agents in the universe are called *blessings*, and the punishments inflicted on the guilty, *penances*. Often I myself have held them in *penance*, when I happened to maintain that all they said that was true was merely the catechism disguised in strange words.

I had the opportunity to convince myself, more than thirty years ago, in a large city in France, that a certain class of these enlightened people had higher ranks unknown to the initiates admitted to their ordinary assemblies; that they even had a cult and priests whom they called by the Hebrew name *cohen*.

It is not that there cannot be, and indeed are not, true, reasonable, and moving things in their works, but these are too easily redeemed by what they have mixed in of falsehood and danger, especially because of their aversion to all priestly authority and hierarchy. This characteristic is universal among them: I have never encountered a perfect exception among the many followers I have known.

The most learned, wisest, and most elegant of modern theosophists, Saint-Martin, whose works formed the code for the men I am discussing, nevertheless shared this general characteristic. He died without having wished to receive a priest ; and his works present the clearest proof that he did not believe in the legitimacy of the Christian priesthood.

While protesting that he had never doubted La Harpe's sincerity in his conversion (and what honest man could doubt it!), he added, however, that *this famous writer did not appear to him to have been guided by the true principles*.

But above all, one must read the preface he placed at the beginning of his translation of the Book of the *Three Principles*, written in German by *Jacob Böhme*: it is there that, after having justified to a certain extent the insults hurled by this fanatic against Catholic priests, he accuses our priesthood as a body of having betrayed its purpose, that is to say, in other words, that God has failed to establish in his religion a priesthood such as it should have been to fulfill his divine purpose. Certainly, this is a great loss, for without this attempt, very little hope remains. However, I will go on my way, gentlemen, as if the Almighty had succeeded, and while the pious disciples of Saint-Martin, *guided*, according to the doctrine of their master, *by the true principles*, undertake to cross the waves by swimming, I will sleep peacefully in this boat which has been sailing happily through the reefs and storms for eighteen hundred and nine years.

I hope, my dear senator, that you will not accuse me of speaking about the Illuminati without knowing them. I saw them often; I copied their writings in my own hand. These men, among whom I had friends, often edified me; often they amused me, and often also... but I do not wish to dwell on certain things. On the contrary, I seek to see only the favorable aspects. I have told you more than once that this sect can be useful in countries separated from the Church, because it maintains religious sentiment, accustoms the mind to dogma, protects it from the deleterious influence of the Reformation, which knows no bounds, and prepares it for reunification. I often recall with the deepest satisfaction that, among the Protestant Illuminati I have known in considerable numbers, I have never encountered a certain bitterness that needed to be expressed by a particular name, because it resembles no other sentiment of that kind: on the contrary, I found in them only kindness, gentleness, and even piety, I mean in their own way. It is not in vain, I hope, that they draw sustenance from the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales, Fénelon, and Saint Teresa: even Madame Guyon, whom they know by heart, will not be of use to them. Nevertheless, despite these advantages, or rather, despite these compensations, Illuminism is no less deadly under the sway of our Church and yours as well, in that it fundamentally destroys the authority that is, however, the basis of our system.

I confess, gentlemen, I understand nothing of a system that believes only in miracles and absolutely demands that priests perform them, under penalty of being declared invalid. Blair gave a fine speech on those well-known words of Saint Paul: “For now we see *things* only as in a mirror and as dim images.” He wonderfully proves that if we knew what happens in the other world, the order of this one would be disturbed and soon destroyed; for man, informed of what awaits him, would no longer have the desire or the strength to act. Just consider the brevity of our lives. Less than thirty years are granted to us in common: who can believe that such a being is destined to converse with angels? If priests are made for communications, revelations, manifestations, etc., then the extraordinary will become our ordinary state. This would be a great marvel; But those who desire miracles are the masters of performing them every day. True miracles are good deeds done in spite of our character and passions. The young man who commands his gaze and desires in the presence of beauty is a greater wonder-worker than Moses, and what priest does not commend such wonders? The simplicity of the Gospel often conceals its depth; we read there: " *If they saw miracles, they would not believe"*; nothing is more profoundly true. The clarity of the intellect has nothing in common with the rectitude of the will. You know well, my old friend, that some men, if they were to find what they seek, might very well become guilty instead of being perfected. What, then, do we lack today, since we are the masters of doing good? And what do priests lack, since they have received the power to enact the law and to pardon transgressions?

That there are mysteries in the Bible is beyond doubt; but to tell you the truth, it matters little to me. I care very little about what a *garment of skin* is. Do you know it better than I do, you who strive to know it? And would we be any better if we did know? Again, search as much as you like: take care, however, not to go too far, and not to delude yourself by indulging your imagination. It has indeed been said, as you recall: *Search the Scriptures*; but how and why? Read the text! *Search the Scriptures, and you will see that they bear witness about me*. (John 5:39) It is therefore only a matter of this already certain fact, and not of endless searches for a future that does not belong to us. And as for that other text, *the stars will fall*, or rather, *will be eclipsed*, the Evangelist immediately adds that *the powers of heaven are shaken*, expressions which are simply a strict translation of the previous ones. The falling stars you see on beautiful summer nights, I confess, hardly trouble my understanding any more. Let us return now...

THE KNIGHT

Not, if you please, before I've had a little argument with our good friend about a suggestion he let slip. He told us quite plainly: " *You have no heroes left*; that's something I cannot let go of. Let other nations defend themselves as they see fit; I will not yield on the honor of my own. The French priest and knight are related, and both are *fearless and blameless*." We must be fair, gentlemen: I believe that, for the glory of *priestly intrepidity*, the Revolution has presented scenes that are in no way inferior to anything that ecclesiastical history offers that is most brilliant in this genre. The massacre of the Carmelites, that of Quiberon, and a hundred other specific events will resound forever throughout the world.

THE SENATOR

Do not scold me, my dear knight; you know, and your friend knows it too, that I am bowing low before the glorious deeds that have distinguished the French clergy during the dreadful period that has just passed. When I said, " *You no longer have heroes*," I spoke generally and without excluding any noble exception: I only meant to indicate a certain universal decline that you feel just as keenly as I do; but I do not wish to dwell on it, and I give you the floor, Count.

THE COUNT

So, since you both want to answer, I'll do so. You're expecting a major event: you know that on this point I completely agree with you, and I explained myself quite clearly in one of our first conversations. I thank you for your reflections on this important subject, and I thank you in particular for your explanation of Virgil's *Pollio* —so simple, so natural, so ingenious —which seems to me entirely *acceptable* in the court of common sense.

I thank you no less for what you tell me about the Bible Society. You are the first thinker who has somewhat reconciled me with an institution that rests entirely on a fundamental error; for it is not the *reading*, but the teaching of Holy Scripture that is useful: the gentle dove, first swallowing and half-grinding the grain that it then distributes to its brood, is the natural image of the Church explaining to the faithful this written word, which it has placed within their reach. Read without notes and without explanation, Holy Scripture is poison. The Bible Society is a Protestant creation, and, as such, you should condemn it as I do; Besides, my dear friend, can you deny that it contains not just a multitude of indifferent people, but even Socinians, staunch deists, and, even more, mortal enemies of Christianity?... You don't answer... one could not answer better... Yet, these are, it must be admitted, singular propagators of the faith! Can you also deny the alarms of the Anglican Church, even though it has not yet formally expressed them? Can you ignore that the *secret views* of this society have been discussed with dread in a multitude of works composed by English doctors? If the Anglican Church, which possesses such great wisdom, has remained silent until now, it is because it finds itself in the painful dilemma of either approving a society that attacks its very foundations or abjuring the senseless yet fundamental dogma of Protestantism: *particular judgment*. There are many other objections that could be raised against the Bible Society, and the best one, Senator, is the one you have raised: *when it comes to proselytizing, what displeases Rome is worthless*. Let us wait for the outcome, which will decide the matter. We are constantly told about the number of *editions*; let them tell us a little about the number of *conversions*. You know, moreover, whether I acknowledge the good faith that is disseminated throughout society, and whether I especially venerate the great names of a few patrons! This respect is such that I have often found myself arguing against myself on the very subject at hand, to see if there might be a way to compromise with its intractable logic. Judge, then, how enthusiastically I embrace the delightful and entirely new perspective from which you allow me to perceive, in a distant, prophetic vision, the effect of an undertaking which, separated from this comforting hope, terrifies religion instead of gladdening it.

Cætera desiderantur

END OF THE ELEVENTH AND FINAL INTERVIEW

FOOTNOTES

1 “Multos inveni aequos adversus homines; adversus Deo, neminem..."(Sen. Ep., XCV).

2 “Deus est auctor mali quod est poena, non autem mali quod est culpa” (Saint Thomas).

3 There would be no difficulty at all if the word were written in Hebrew characters, for if each letter of*Iovi* is marked by the appropriate vowel point, the result is exactly the sacred name of the Hebrews. Leaving aside the word Jupiter, which is an anomaly, the analogy between the other forms of this name given to the supreme God and the*Tetragrammaton*is certainly quite remarkable. (Author's note.)

4 *Maurice's history of Indostan*(London).

5 At the time when Calas's memory was rehabilitated, the Duke of A... asked a resident of Toulouse how it was possible that the court of that city had made such a cruel mistake; to which the latter replied with a trivial proverb: "There is no good horse that does not stumble." "Good," replied the Duke, "but a whole stable!"

6 Bourdaloue made the same observation in his sermon on predestination: “Vis sanus fieri?”

7 Cf. *Imitation*(1. I, ch. 3).

8 Preface to the Mass during Lent.

9 “Homicida ab initio” (Joan.,VIII, 44).

10 Order allows fathers and mothers to be virgins in their generations, so that disorder may find its torment there; it is through this that your work advances, supreme God... O depth of knowledge attached to the generation of beings!*Phusis tôn anthrôpinôn spermatôn*... I wish to leave you without reservation to the supreme agent; it is enough that he has deigned to grant us here below an inferior image of the laws of his emanation. Virtuous spouses! regard yourselves as angels in exile, etc. (L.-Cl. de Saint-Martin,*Man of Desire*).

11 “Fracta et debilitata” (Cicero).

12 Rom.,VII, 24.

13 Rom.,VII, 16.

14 Ovid:

Video meliora, proboque

Deteriora sequor... (Met.)

15 Of Iside and Osiride (Plutarch).

16 Micah, V, 2; Isaiah, LIII, 8.

17 Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*.

18 We can add that all torture is torture in both senses of the Latin word*supplicium*, from which ours comes: for*all torture is a form of supplication*. Woe, then, to the nation that would abolish torture! For the debt of each guilty party constantly falls upon the nation, the latter would be forced to pay without mercy and could even, in the end, find itself treated as insolvent according to the full rigor of the laws.

19. His own executioner.

20 What shall I write to you today, Conscript Father? Or how shall I write to you, or what should I not write to you at all? If I myself know, may the gods and goddesses cause me to perish even more horribly than I feel myself perishing every day! (*Tac. Ann.*,VI, 6.)

21 But if the neighbor's fair-skinned daughter gives you a voluptuous smile, does your heart continue to beat calmly? (*Pers. Sat.*,III.)

22 Ps. CXVIII.

23 *Epistle to Rollin*, by Jean-Baptiste Rousseau.

24 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

25 Isaiah, VIII.

26 Ps. IX.

27 Joseph de Maistre himself.

28 Saint Francis Xavier.

29 Modern biographers of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin are not so sure about this.

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